"THE DAMP MAN AGAIN" — ALLISON V. HARDING

Weird Tales

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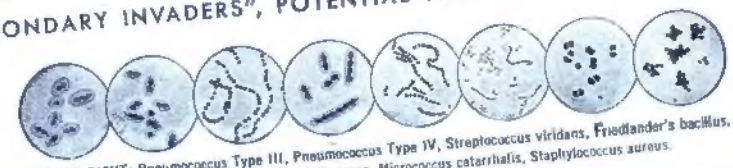

LEFT TO RIGHT: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus viridans, Friedlander's bacillus, Streptococcus hemolyticus, Bacillus influenzae, Micrococcus catarrhalis, Staphylococcus aureus.

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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

MAY, 1949

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LONG NOVELETTE

THE DAMP MAN AGAIN . . . . . **Allison V. Harding** **4**

From the depths of men's minds, from the outer reaches of their knowledge come strange and terrible consequences that exceed the mortal imagination.

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A phone rings at night but there is no one at the other end but death and a dedication to revenge.

Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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JULIUS UNGER ● Box 35, Brooklyn 4, New York

The Damp Man Again

Further dreadful evidence in the strange chronicle of a dreaded person. . . .

EXPERIENCES with madmen seem commonplace, judging by the daily press, but an individual case among one's own acquaintance is less easy to come upon. The "mad experimentalists" dear both to the hearts of Hollywood Grade-B movie producers and the writers of thrill-fiction are, happily for the general populace, something of a rarity.

George Pelgrim of the *Gazette* and one of that newspaper's ablest and most discerning reporters, was well aware that, in this instance, he had a sensational and bona fide case of the kind that would abash even some of the most colorful writers of lurid make-believe. The adventures that Pelgrim had just had with the Damp Man, that fabulous, beyond-normal, "unhuman," the living testimony of an experiment which should never have been undertaken, had stimulated the young reporter's mind to a degree that made the "taboo" attitude on the story from his City Desk hard to take.

The Damp Man, Lother Remsdorf, Jr., now no more, Pelgrim mused as he sat in the huge old house at View Cliffs overlooking the sea, was an explosive subject. The man himself, even if not that in the true sense biologically, had borne a name that meant both wealth and power. Enough wealth and power to squash not only a relatively insignificant reporter like Pelgrim, but also any paper, however large and influential, that stood behind him.

A sample of this that still loomed large in George's mind was the memory of the fact, incredible but true, that Remsdorf, to suit his purposes at the end of their recent duel, had even bought Pelgrim's paper, the *Gazette*. A man who would go to such extremes to further some small phase of his outlandish plans was, of course, not sane.

Remsdorf had not been sane any more than he'd been normal. A man of strange, peculiar content, his body filled with an outlandish physiological proportion of water; immune to many of the menaces from which the average flesh cringes, for a well-aimed bullet or knife-thrust—an open door for the letting of the life's blood of any other individual—was merely as a gnat's bite to Remsdorf. The man had no blood in the medical man's sense of the word, but merely a watery, colorless substance. His vital organs, despite the immense size of him, were compressed and hidden away within the fluid-fat monstrousness of the creature.

There was a brain that could guide the senses, the sight and hearing and speech, and it could think with a cunning that far exceeded the average. Lother Remsdorf, Jr.'s obsession was the obsession that is often peculiarly the part of the abnormal. In his awful abnormality, with its connotations of inferiority, he will develop a philosophy that finally accepts the certitude that the inferiority, the "difference" is, in reality, a vast superiority.

IT WAS Lother Remsdorf's undying obsession, his destiny, that he would found a new race that drove him along strange paths and by-ways, into actions of both criminal and murderous intent. The fact that he chanced upon Linda Mallory, the blonde swimmer of statuesque beauty, was undoubtedly coincidence, but with this aquatic star, Remsdorf's dream of a new racial empire flourished. The girl's feelings concerning his sinister advances mattered not one whit, and

Heading by John Giunta

By Allison V. Harding

it was in this connection that George, covering a swimming meet, had met Linda, filled with fear instead of a swimming victor's sense of satisfaction.

The persistent efforts of Remsdorf, Jr., to force Linda to become his "bride," to kidnap her or to obtain her by any means or method, made for an incredulous tale that his own *Gazette* would have none of. But Pelgrim had kept an account of the happenings, and as a self-styled biographer of the Remsdorf case, he was unquestionably more intimate with it than any other living person.

George had long since taken the exhausted Linda Mallory back to the city, but something composed in part of curiosity and part of compulsion sent him back on a return trip to the old mansion overlooking the sea. He had let himself in through a side door, purposely left open, and found himself surrounded by the somber huge emptiness of the ancient building in that part of night that is deepest and most silent.

The basement, turned into an experimental chamber, held little but paraphernalia and equipment, most of which were beyond his ken. He worked methodically from room to room, the single ray of his flashlight probing and searching here and there. Now the wind from seaward would rattle a shutter or whistle in the eaves, and he would straighten, and for a moment chill with expectation. Then the reassuring thought of the monster's demise would soothe his tired and jangled nerves and Pelgrim would go back to his searching.

Upstairs in a giant, black-paneled room with high-vaulted ceiling, George found himself face to face with a huge portrait of Lother Remsdorf, Jr. It seemed huge because the man was huge; the painting was life-size, realistic even down to the drab black clothes, the broadness and grossness and the white fleshy face, eyes almost inhuman hidden behind puffs of cheekbones and eyebrows.

The likeness was . . . extraordinary. The eyes looked forward directly into George's own eyes, and if he moved around the room from any point in it, he could feel them on him. The mouth was stern, the thick lips set. The artist, whoever he may have been, had certainly captured the very spirit and soul of his sinister subject.

Or, George's journalistic mind admitted precisely, the painter had captured the very soullessness of the creature.

IT WAS while the *Gazette's* reporter was looking full into the portrait's face that he had the sudden idea that was almost a compulsion sending him forward. He swiveled the picture, and its hanging wire swiveled it further. And there behind it was the knob of a wall safe. In the workroom of the basement George soon found a crowbar. Returning, he attacked the hiding place with vigor, and after a while, its smallness and vulnerability gave in to the attack. The door sagged open on metal hinges and he shoved his light inside.

There was, of course, the instantaneous disappointment of not finding neat pack after pack of crisp high-denomination bills. George had never opened a safe before, but his fiction reading told him to expect something of that nature. Instead, there was nothing inside here but a book. He drew it out and opened its brown-leather cover. It was a diary. The diary of Lother Remsdorf, Jr.

Pelgrim carefully pushed the bent safe door back into some approximation of its original position, swiveled the picture into place and found himself a relatively comfortable inside room where the light from his torch could not possibly be seen from outside. He was, he reminded himself, trespassing in every sense of the word. The facts of what had taken place in that house earlier that night mattered not in the eyes of the law and their unquestioned feeling towards him should he be apprehended roaming around a house to which he did not belong. In spite of this, Pelgrim settled into a chair and found himself reading.

As he followed the words put down in a tight scrawl on the lined pages of the diary, he felt himself living through the eyes and senses of the person or thing who'd written these words. As he perused page after page, his mind flashed back to his earlier episodes with the Damp Man. Back to the events in this very house, and such a little while ago, when Lother Remsdorf, Jr., had contrived

to make Linda Mallory into the same sort of being that he, himself, was. So that between them there'd come to be a race of different and superior biological and physiological creatures.

As Pelgrim read on, he found himself walking down the dark streets of night with Remsdorf, Jr., in many strange places. The Damp Man's thoughts became his own. Perhaps not necessarily through any power of Lother's writings in the diary, but because of Pelgrim's own imagination and his intimacy with the whole outré affair.

When Lother Remsdorf, Jr. walked the outskirts of an industrial town finding a little factory girl who resisted his advances, Pelgrim could feel the whole thing. And that moment, the same night, with her referring to the Damp Man as "You fat slob! Get away from me."

He could see the sudden burst of energy that transformed the elephantine monster into a lightning-quick creature of destruction for all his size. And he could visualize the slack, limp thing that lay at the side of the road beyond the outskirts of the farthest lights from the tavern; a bundle of useless inertness that a moment ago had been the factory girl, who had decided with a woman's right that Remsdorf "wasn't the kind of fellow" she wanted to have an evening's fun with.

LOTHER REMSDORF, JR., had but to write a check for any amount and the money was his. It was a fact of his life that he accepted as he accepted his physical proportions, which were immense, and those Other Things. The father that had "begot" him, the scientist-experimentalist father, was, he felt very sure, destroyed now in a burst of maniacal frenzy against the man whose blunder had done this to him. Like a drunken mother who drops her year-old baby downstairs, dooming it to life as a cripple.

For Lother had *known*. It had been evident, as his mind had grown to catch up with his body, from the first time perhaps that he had shaved and the blade, as it will with men all over the world, had slipped and cut deeply, and what had spurted forth had not been blood. Not blood but a strange watery serum. He remembered the country physician he'd seen almost by accident in some small community when he'd crushed his hand at some now-forgotten task. The physician, on examining him, had been amazed. There had been questions—so many questions that Remsdorf had finally fled, not answering, leaving the country practitioner to doubt his own sanity, to inquire into the back recesses of his mind if he'd been drunk the "night the man with the crushed hand came" or if he, a humble country doctor, had seen the ninth wonder of the world.

Remsdorf's injured hand had filled and righted itself, and he found that physical injuries and diseases to which the flesh of normal man falls heir were not to be his. But there were other matters less advantageous. With all his cellular and metabolic differences, there was a likeness to his fellow men that made his path difficult.

Like his fellow men, he sat through his share of burlesque shows and musical comedies, ogling the stripped and semi-stripped females that paraded their tired bodies before the public. And as time passed, his yearning, which was a part of some other man he might have been before those things that had been done to him, that yearning became a hatred, and the hatred a scheming cunning.

With his money, of course there were girls. For enough money you can get almost anything in this world—sad but true. They were girls from the poorer circumstances of life as a rule, whose loathing for him showed through their set smiles as they accepted his advances as a necessary part of a very unpleasant way of "getting by."

He looked at them as one does at dolls in a toy store. And these that came to him were of usual kinds. Most of them were scrawny with pasty faces and straight hair, thin bodies and high-pitched voices. There were some that were fleshy, lumpy and bulging in the wrong places, their figures sagging with their memories, trying to appear younger than they were . . . which wasn't young. In common, the thin and the fat had their dyed hair and their screeching voices and their speech, which was "hep," they liked to think, and in the vernacular.

And they hated him, which he knew, and

he hated them, which in all their smallness of soul and stupidity, they still did not know.

But they were none of them what he wanted, for gradually Lother Remsdorf, Jr., was evolving a plan and an idea which would make of him not a despised, loathsome creature, but a superior superman, which was what he indubitably was. He was, he knew by now with a real understanding, something like that fictional thrill-getter, the zombie, the walking dead. Things in his midnight wanderings and experiences happened to him that would injure, cripple or kill an ordinary mortal.

HE WAS, for instance, hit by an auto on Chicago's State Street one night. The auto was going much too fast, and his heavy body was thrown through the air to land with a wet smack on the curbstones. But, he thought with some amusement afterward, the woman driver's shock was much greater when she saw him rise, leaving behind no blood but the damp imprint of his great abnormal body on the sidewalk, than if he had remained there, a self-respecting corpse in a pool of honest blood.

Oh, Lother Remsdorf, Jr., had something. He was relatively invulnerable. Who knows, he might be immortal! It was a titillating thought and spurred him on to find the maiden of his ideal with whom he could appropriately start a new and mightier racial strain.

There was, first of all, Joy. He'd seen her first at a fashionable country club horse show, her raven-black hair falling down around her perfect oval face, the riding habit setting off the well-built figure as she sat her horse. Introductions had to be made; at that level people were considerably more conventional, as the educated usually are. For to the world, Remsdorf appeared simply as a large and obese man with a somewhat forbidding, unhandsome face and a penchant, if he did not disguise the fact with his dark clothes, of perspiring too much.

However, Joy was easy, and the whole thing looked quite propitious. With the introductions and the behind-the-hands whispering that probably dealt with his size and unattractiveness were words from the same sources that spoke of his immense wealth. And it so happened at that moment in the world's history that Joy Sutter's family were hard up and in considerable need of some refinancing.

That irrevocable fact helped to gloss over some of Remsdorf's more obvious shortcomings. And before long the Damp Man and the raven-haired beauty could be seen at country socials and functions. Remsdorf felt he was getting somewhere, with occasional invitations from the family. He realized and recognized in himself a consuming desire to at least ape other men in some ways, and marriage would be the logical consummation of this.

Joy was an attractive playmate. Her limbs were well-molded, her face finely chiseled, and her family properly anxious even if, as Remsdorf knew intuitively, it was his bankroll that concerned them rather than the innate qualities that went with the man. The two talked occasionally, said what was necessary to and from the country club or the beach club, and as the weeks passed Lother permitted himself the measured optimism of one who sees his goal coming within reach. There had been, up to this time, no such intimacies as are commonplace among the young country sets.

The night of the Frost Island barbecue, Remsdorf, arrayed in his usual dark suit which had now come to be at least openly accepted by the beach club, squired Joy Sutter. The island was not far off the shore frontage of the yacht club, and the guests made the trip in small boats. It was a lark as the girls in gay-colored shorts or slacks and their escorts took to the water in whatever type of craft seemed most easily available. Some commandeered small sailing boats, while others with more ambition or stronger backs ventured forth in rowboats. There were a few power craft, and Joy whispered to Lother of a skiff with outboard motor of which she knew the whereabouts.

The black-haired girl, who'd been reared in the sort of society that knew well its piano lessons, how to sit a horse, set a Star canvas and spin the flywheel of an outboard, showed her bulky companion the working of the small motor. Then laughing at his clumsiness, she let Remsdorf take over and they pushed off from land following the

others out across tranquil evening water to Frost Island.

The trip took a good half hour, but Lother, watching the hair of the girl seated in the bow of the boat, the long tresses windblown backward like a dark pennant in the twilight, wished it took longer. They did not speak because it was hard to be understood over the putt of the outboard, but once or twice she smiled at him, and it kindled the sense of anticipation Remsdorf had brought with him this night. For tonight he had decided to ask Joy—the blessing of her family assured, he knew—to be his wife.

THE barbecue was like a barbecue. They roasted frankfurters, toasted rolls, ate pickles, and played foolish games that were all the more foolish at their age. After a while, the liquid refreshments took on a potency that lessened the inhibitions of the party.

As the gaiety of the picnickers increased, Remsdorf, taking a drink here and there for appearance sake, nevertheless, found himself at the outskirts of the laughing, singing and joking groups. It bothered him particularly that his Joy—he was allowing himself to think of her in that way now—was paying less and less attention to him as the evening progressed and more and more to the group of tanned, broad-shouldered young men who inevitably circle around an attractive girl.

It was possible, yea, probable, that with the number of drinks consumed, Joy's concern for the hard circumstances surrounding the Sutter family's life, diminished, and her perception of the attractiion of other young men increased. Lother made several attempts to catch her eye and finally forced himself forward to stand by her side.

"Joy," he said in his rumbling, cavernous voice.

She stopped laughing long enough to look at him briefly.

"Let's walk up the beach a ways."

She pointed at him and giggled, swaying a bit unsteadily on her feet. One of the tanned young men with the broad shoulders leaned forward to support her.

"Who's your blimp boyfriend?"

Everybody laughed. Remsdorf seethed and withdrew to stand again in the background, unseen, his dark suit blending into the night blackness of the island beyond the rim of firelight.

Later, Remsdorf saw his chance and seized it. The cavaliers, drawn away by various drink-fetching tasks, left Joy standing alone for a minute, and in that time, Remsdorf was by her again drawing her away from the firelight.

"No, no!" she protested in a thick voice. "Don't want to go!"

But it was nothing for his thick arm to propel her as he wanted. It was getting late, and the rumble of anger in his own breast had found an answer far westward in the night sky. There was a storm coming, and after all, he had promised himself that tonight was to be theirs. He drew her down beside him on a rock facing the dark, now-still water. The romance of the night was curtailed by her unwillingness, but he held her there against any desire to run back to the young men at the barbecue.

"Joy," he breathed, and the words came out with a giant exhalation. "I want you to be my wife!"

He had been holding her by the shoulders somewhat tightly and became conscious of it when she relaxed completely. He thought that was the response he sought, but then he felt her shoulders heaving. He wondered why she sobbed, until the awful truth overtook him. It was laughter, and she shook with it.

"You!" she finally managed to gasp. *"You!"* And then her words became unintelligible for the laughter.

He felt a great shaking starting deep inside of him. But it was a different emotion from hers, and his giant arms and hands tensed.

"Your family . . ." he rumbled, playing his strong card, which now seemed pitifully deuce-low. "Your family—*they* approve!"

The girl swayed against him and away as though moved inexorably by the gusts of her own mirth.

"I marry *you!*"

In a second more he knew his rage would be a bigger thing than her laughter. But in that second, the gloom that shrouded this dreadful scene was flecked and streaked

with bobbing light. It was one of the tanned young cavaliers carrying a torch and calling, "Joy! Joy, darling! Where are you?"

She got up unsteadily, but quick enough to evade the Damp Man's grab, and then she was running towards the light and the young man, still giggling at the huge joke, chattering about it, and as she went back towards the barbecue, it seemed that those she met and learned of it laughed with her until the sound was proportionately larger than the man who caused it.

THEN it began to rain as it does on a summer night, softly and suddenly without warning, from a sky that hides behind the darkness. It rained harder as though for the unshed tears in Remsdorf's giant body, and the barbecue fire sputtered and sizzled out. The merrymakers oohed with disappointment and tried to tuck themselves away under what scant shrubbery the island afforded, the men holding jackets over the girls' heads.

But the wind began to blow, and the wisest of the yacht-club set advised that the trip back to the mainland should be started immediately or they might well be stuck for the night on Frost Island. People ran, and the boats drawn up along the beach were rapidly filled. Remsdorf, forgotten now in the confusion and the big joke that he had afforded all of them, walked until he saw the boat Joy was in. It was raining even harder and she was already in the prow. Lother waited until the young man with the too-broad shoulders had started the outboard and was about to push off.

Remsdorf stepped forward then, got into the boat with an ungainly lurch and shoved the young man hard, viciously. In the next instant, one giant leg had pushed out mightily and they were afloat and free, the voice of the bested swain lost in the general confusion and the growing sounds of the storm.

When Joy turned and saw *his* bulk at the outboard instead of the tanned young man, the flickering lightning showed her disgust, but the mirth was gone. The water that drove her black hair flat to her head had also driven some of the liquor out of her befuddled brain. She turned and stared ahead.

For a while, there were other boats around and Lother steered by watching them. But in the blackness and rising water, they soon found themselves alone. He called out, the harsh rumble of his voice rising above the water-slap against the hull and the beat of the rain.

"Which way, Joy?"

She hesitated a moment and then pointed mutely. He wondered if she knew for sure, and that was a small joke for him. Water came over the prow now, and Joy moved back into the center of the skiff. The wind grew strong, strong enough even to lift the heavy, wet strands of her hair, to spin their skiff this way and that, and cause this girl who had derided him a moment ago to turn her frightened, rain-streaked face towards him beseechingly.

And that was when the Damp Man laughed, a hearty echo to her girlish peals of the earlier evening.

"Scared, Joy?" he called above the shrieking wind.

And she sat amidships and stared back at him, her eyes widened by what she saw in his face. Suddenly the words came, the hysteria, the cries and screams.

BUT the boat drove on into the ever-heavier seas, and the black water coming over the sides slopped at their feet. She screamed again, but her words were unintelligible things. She prayed. She entreated. But there was no one to hear but Lother Remsdorf, and he enjoyed this game more than any of the others they'd played on the island. She should enjoy it too, he thought ironically, for it would be her last.

The skiff was narrow of beam, and as he moved his gigantic weight from one side to the other, the craft would dip sharply and take in more and more water. Joy would try to counter-balance by throwing herself against the lifted thwart, but it was as a matchstick.

It was a glorious moment for him as he drove the foundering skiff directly into the head sea, felt that last wave sweep into them and over them, and the boat, a dead, lonely thing now, drop away beneath them. She was at him, a cat in the water, clawing and grabbing, and if she made noise, the waves slapped it from her mouth. Her eyes were

big from the horror of it, and gradually, using his weight easily, he forced her under by her shoulders and then her head. He thought at the time that Joy's struggles were pitifully feeble, that this girl's effort for life was a poor thing, lasting for but a short time. He held her beneath the churning water with his knees and the full-length reach of his tremendous arms for a bit longer and then pulled her up, holding her by the hair, looking at her face set in final, twisted agony. As he threw this dead, lifeless thing away from him, he wondered how he had ever found her pretty or desirable, and he was glad it had happened this way.

Then he took to the business of swimming, an entirely familiar and effortless act, for water was his medium and in water he reveled. His ponderous strokes did not speed, with concession to the storm but took their time, and finally there was something under his feet. He found land, walked up on it aways, and although not feeling the need for rest, laid down when he was a reasonable distance from the water. It would look better this way.

Joy was the only casualty, but two other boats had overturned and there'd been some close calls. Remsdorf was contriteness personified with the Sutters. He told his simple straightforward story that they had been swamped in the storm, and at the first moment of going over, he had lost track of Joy in the confusion. He had called and swum in circles as nearly as he could but had not seen her again.

The girl's body was found a few days later. The verdict of accidental drowning was confirmed, and at the ceremony, the usual moistness of Remsdorf's face was taken for tears of exquisite sorrow.

But the quest must continue. He knew that as he slipped away from the country community and made his way to the city. There were other girls, other trials and errors, but Remsdorf, with experience, was cagier. And then finally there was Terry. Terry, who sang with a band in a downtown "joint."

Terry was young, maybe so young she had had to lie her way into this present employment. She had looks and sparkle. She was medium-sized, with the big sensual breasts of a much larger girl. Remsdorf saw her first in her place of employment, singing some tired song about "love" and "moon" and "June" in a low-cut evening dress that showed her off to considerable advantage. The song didn't matter (there are ten thousand husky contraltos) but the evening dress did; it caught his attention and every male eye in the place.

A twenty-dollar bill to the headwaiter got him through a dingy backstairs route to Terry's dressing-room, and another twenty did wonders to get the introductions off running.

"Miss Wilson, this is Mister Lother Remsdorf, Jr. Says he liked your singing. Wanted to meet you."

The eyebrow of the flunky dipped appropriately to signify, "Sucker. Sucker. I got into him a little, now it's your turn."

"Thanks, Maurice."

It was the same husky contralto, and it sounded good in the tiny, untidy dressing-room, better even than when it whispered "love" and "moon" and "June" in front of the blasé, five-piece orchestra.

Remsdorf said something about going out somewhere with him and having a drink. He'd like to talk to her about "opportunities." She was still wearing the dress, and he ogled and that pleased her, for that was obviously what the dress was for.

THE date was that easily arranged, and as promised, she met him later after she'd had had time to "slip into something else." The "something else" was also entirely alluring, and as they chattered at an expensive uptown nightclub, Terry spoke of admiring clothes that "bring out my personality." Remsdorf smirked at that and thought the girl was either very stupid or very smart but what did it matter.

As time passed, Terry Wilson became the new edition of Joy Sutter. By this time, at considerable expense and trouble, Lother Remsdorf, Jr., had amassed as much as possible of his father's scientific experimental data and notes, prior to the "explosion" which had taken the scientist's life. They dealt in the main, of course, with the experiment of which the Damp Man himself was the product. It occurred to him in-

creasingly that in the development of this new and biologically superior race on earth, there should be as little as possible left to chance. The girl he would choose for the ultimate experiment would be subjected to the same radiatory and physiological therapys as he himself had withstood to emerge as he now was.

Terry Wilson, all unknowing of course, accepted his gifts, saw him more than occasionally and went on singing at the "joint." It happened not too much later that Terry, one evening at an outside cafe, bent her finger around Lother's suit cuff and cooed at him in her voice that came with the huskiness when she wanted something particularly, but this was troublesome because it could not be bought at a store. It was in the nature of a sort of ultimatum.

"No, honey, I'm just *not* going to be able to see you next week. Got some friends coming on next week and I'm going to be pretty busy."

Remsdorf tried petulance, tried the suggestion that he would withdraw his generous patronage, but she made a face at him that said she knew he didn't mean it and couldn't do it. He took his troubles a few days later to the manager of the "joint" where he'd first spied Terry. The manager's friendship and ear had been long since won over by good denomination bills from the Remsdorf wallet. The manager was a canny man. He had ideas. It was he who joked within hearing of his female singer about her low-cut dresses, saying that she "sang with her body instead of her voice, which last she ain't got much of." Terry didn't seem to mind.

The friends were people the "joint's" boss just didn't know much about, was all Remsdorf got for his pumping. The manager thought the Wilson girl had been in with a fast, tough kind of crowd, but what she did with her spare time was no concern of his, this with a shrug of the shoulder.

Lother hired a private detective, and that worthy stuck to Terry during the week when she couldn't see the Damp Man. His reports were duly filed. The chap, so discovered the Damp Man, was one, Frankie Macklin, a boy with a bad reputation in the midwest, a police record and some dubious activities. Macklin had along with him a couple of rugged musclemen who'd also known the inside of a detention pen and looked it.

The week up, the private eye went back to divorce cases and Remsdorf went back to Terry. When he asked her who her friends were and how about an introduction, she blew smoke at him.

"Just friends, Big Bear." She had a habit of calling him that and he didn't mind. He'd been called worse things.

It was a tug of war, and neither of them gave in.

"Well, if you don't *trust* me . . . and anyway, you don't *own* me!" She flounced off, looking as the storybooks say, prettier in anger than he'd ever seen her.

He stayed for all her appearances the next night, listened to her sing and agreed more than ever with the critical opinion of her voice offered by the manager.

WHEN he tried to make up afterwards, she pouted. Phone calls to her hotel were not put through, and Remsdorf paced the floor unable to rest his giant bulk until some break in their quarrel. As a few more days passed, the Damp Man pounded the lobby of her hotel. He ingratiated himself with the house detective there, only to find after the exchange of considerable folding stuff that Terry was no longer in the building but had moved to another dwelling, the exact whereabouts unknown.

His contacts at the "joint" also shrugged their shoulders. Where Miss Wilson lived, after all, was her own business. She didn't need to share that knowledge with her employers.

Terry continued to warble her songs and her low-cut dresses fascinated the patrons as they had Remsdorf. Then, unexpectedly, he got a phone call from her. She was at the Apex Hotel. Could he come over? He went, and she greeted him affectionately in something flimsy. She apologized for her behavior, but she'd been in some trouble. Well, not recently, but something she'd inherited long ago from her family. She knew he'd understand. But it was important that she get out of this city. He knew how those things were. Now she had an

opportunity somewhere else to get her own place, but it would take a little capital. Well, she didn't know how much; she didn't even know the exact details. Perhaps the whole thing wouldn't come off, but she wondered . . . she just wondered if he wouldn't help her just a little.

The meeting was one of forgiveness and promises. She ran her hand through his hair and pinched his big fleshy cheek, but once when she turned her head away, he caught the look on her face in the across-room mirror. It was the same look he'd seen on so many women's faces. It made him feel as he'd felt many times before. But Terry, even playing at love, was better, he guessed, than most other girls in sincerity.

"Terry," he murmured in his rumbling, deep-from-within voice, "you know I'd back you in any venture and for any amount. There's something else, though. If you go away, I want to go wherever you go! You see, Terry, I've been thinking about asking you to become . . . ."

She hushed him there, but with a mixture of shyness and provocativeness that made him feel he'd been gauche and abrupt.

"Don't let's talk about that now," she pleaded.

With a giant hand, he took his checkbook out of his pocket.

"Oh dear! Not that either now, Big Bear! Honey, you must think I'm interested in you just because you've got *money!*"

He left, and that part of him, that part of his highly sensitive and beyond-normal cerebellum that told him the whole thing was a sham and a fake was definitely subordinated to the rest of him that thrilled to her and her words and the evening they'd spent together.

He went home, and the water-like serum that coursed through his veins and body pumped feverishly, his great hands gripping and ungripping, his mind filled with what would come next.

IN the next few days, he saw Terry, but no more intimately than the others who came to the cheap nightspot to ogle and hear her sing. She waved at him; once he caught up with her just outside of her dressing-room and she shook her head with a little frown that stopped him.

"No, please, I have so much to think about! I'm going to get in touch with you soon though. I *need* you!"

That held Lother until her summons. She called him one morning very early, so early that the position of the hands of the clock made him disbelieve that it could be her.

"It's Terry!" she repeated again.

He sat up sleepily, holding the instrument in one huge moist paw, but the huskiness of her voice charmed him as it always had. The early hour took nothing away.

"Look," she relayed. "This thing I've been telling you about. You know. I think the break's come. I'm quitting my job. After tonight's the last!"

"You're leaving town!" he rumbled.

"Yes. Yes, this is really an opportunity, darling. But I . . . I want you to go with me and I was wondering—" Her voice hung there like ripe fruit refusing to drop until she continued. "You *said* (a slight inflection there) you'd like to help!"

"Of course I did and I would."

"Well, you see, just to get started . . ."

"How much?" broke in Remsdorf. "Just tell me and it's yours."

"It seems like an awful lot . . . ten thousand dollars?"

"I'll get it as soon as the bank opens."

"You're a darling! I don't know what I'd do without you, Big Bear!"

"When do you want it?" he asked, pleased at the warmth in her voice.

"I'll tell you," she thought audibly. "I've got a little feeling that maybe they won't be too keen about me after running out on the joint tonight. I think you'd better meet me somewhere and we'll leave. Is that okay?"

"Anything you say, Terry."

"I'll call you and tell you where later."

"As you say."

"Oh, and darling! I know the way you rich men are. Don't go and get that ten thousand in the great big fat bills I suppose you're used to. We're going to need it for silly things like train fare and hotels and getting settled out there—together!"

The "together" made Remsdorf hang up

with pleasurable expectancy. Later in the day, he drew out the money in fives, tens, and twenties—it made a good-sized envelope full—and stuffed the whole in his inside breast pocket.

He waited in his room that evening, his gigantic form overflowing the largest chair, big blunt fingers tapping restlessly on the telephone table. As midnight approached, he wondered if the bad night had caused any change in her plans, for it was storming outside, a continuous spring drizzle that streaked his high-up hotel room windows.

But a few minutes after midnight, the phone jangled. He picked it up and she said, "Darling, it's Terry. All set to meet me?"

"I've been waiting," he intoned.

"I'll tell you where," and she gave him an address across town. "That's not far from the uptown railway station," she said.

"Are they sorry you're leaving down there at the Club?"

"Oh heavens!" she deplored. "Don't let's go into *that!* You know how these people are. Won't give you an inch if they think you can better yourself. I think Joe (the manager) is going to lasso me at the last minute to try and stop me from going! You be there, and promptly at one sharp. There's a train a few minutes later we can catch."

He agreed dutifully.

"Oh, and darling. You have the money of course? Good! That's mighty important to us!"

HE left the hotel in the rain, took a cab to the other side of town to the directed address. It was in a poor section of warehouses and rundown tenements. Just beyond the intersection where one of the squalid streets met the avenue, the railroad, which from here to downtown burrowed underground in its lower tunnel, came out into the open beneath the high walled sides to become further up an elevated that ran above the dirty city streets until it reached the outskirts to run level again and regain its true character.

Lother paid the cab off and stood on the corner under a dingy streetlamp. His watch said quarter to one. Better early than late. A rumble beneath the sidewalk on which he stood developed into a shooting, lighted thing that rushed out onto the suddenly exposed tracks beyond the embankment and opening of the tunnel. He watched the train flow westward, changing the semaphores as it fled beneath them from green to red.

With the train gone away into the distance, there was nothing left but the soft persistent hiss of the rain. That, with the lateness of the hour, drove whatever life there might be left in these squalid surroundings far away indoors. It contributed a feeling as though he were alone in the world, the Damp Man thought, and he did not for a minute dislike it. His watch showed a couple of minutes to one, and he wondered if Terry would be on time or if there would be some slip-up.

A moment or so later, he heard from out somewhere beyond the wall of rain and dampness the single steeple chime of a bell tolling the hour. Another train vibrated the spot on which he stood, this time from the outward direction roaring from the night into the greater darkness of the tunnel and the bright depot at tube's end.

Almost before the rumbling was gone, there was the sound of a motor. Headlights showed down the avenue, and soon the vehicle drew abreast of his position under the streetlamp, stopping on the shadowed opposite side. He thought it must be Terry, and then knew he was wrong as two men got out of the back. But it must have something to do with her, with him, for they came directly forward.

They were medium-sized men with fedoras and trenchcoats and hands in pockets. Their eyes were white under the streetlamp and their faces drawn and unpleasant. They said nothing but came closer. The trenchcoat on the right crossed first, his fist coming out of a pocket. It held a club-like something and it abruptly swung at the Damp Man's head. Still no word had been spoken, no sound except the skuffing quickened footwork of the two. The blow missed his head and thwacked into a mushy shoulder.

Remsdorf grabbed the man with one arm

in a bent hook, and then there were voices, sounds. The man squealed and said, "For Chris' sake, Frankie, get him!"

The one addressed produced a revolver.

"Let go of him. Let's have the dough!"

Remsdorf tightened his grip on the gasping opponent within his grasp. The car across the street spewed forth another figure; this time the driver, coming to reinforce.

Utilizing his gigantic strength in sudden movement, Remsdorf flung the man he'd imprisoned brutally to the ground. There was a sickening thud of head against concrete, and the opposing force had been reduced by one. The one addressed as Frankie was snarling now. The black thing in his hand made noise, and Remsdorf's clothing at his side tugged and tore. Then a sweeping motion of his giant arm sent this man, too, crashing to the ground.

The third attacker had stopped abruptly, unnerved by the sudden change in the tide of battle, undecided wheher to attack or flee, and in that second, the momentous bulk of the Damp Man was upon him, bearing him to the ground.

Then there was almost no sound for a while but the hissing of the rain. The hissing became louder, or perhaps it was the sound of bodies being dragged across concrete, two at a time, one hand on each collar.

It was a game there at the embankment overlooking the mouth of the tunnel. It was a game between Remsdorf and the signals, and he rumbled with deep, moist laughter as he hoisted first one body and then the other over the fence that guarded the tracks below, toppling them down with a gentle shove.

In the next moment, there was the small earthquake again, and a train poured out of its tunnel hiding-place to tear and pound over those insignificant gunny-sacklike thinks that lay across the rails.

When Remsdorf turned with a smile on his wet face, the one called Frankie had raised himself on elbow, his face the face of one who has looked into Hell and is too stunned to fully believe what he saw. But Frankie still had the black thing in his hand, and the revolver spoke again and again as the Damp Man moved for him slowly, laughing softly.

THE gun was useless with emptiness before Lother's measured treads took him within reach of the nearly prone figure on the sidewalk, its bullets wasted in the fluid mass of his monster body. The Damp Man kneeled on the other's chest, pinioning Frankie with his overwhelming weight, and tired of the railroad-tunnel game, he placed his mammoth hands on the other man's head and turned it gently and yet with a firmness that would allow no disobedience.

Frankie may have been dead from shock and horror, but if not the last twist of those hands did for him. The snap was like the sound made by children playing make-believe games with a wishbone, only a man is bigger than a chicken and his neck vertebra is bigger than the chicken's wishbone. Frankie's head fell slackly as Lother Remsdorf, with sudden inspiration, gathered the gunsel up in his arms and made for the car parked across the street.

The Apex Hotel was a twenty-five-minute drive through wet streets, deserted in these small hours of the morning. It was a smallish building in an unpretentious section. It catered to the theatrical element though, and Lother knew that the lobby could not be counted upon to be empty even at this hour of nearly two a.m. He parked the car a block away, looked up and down to see that the rainswept street was empty of pedestrians or other traffic and picked Macklin up with consummate ease, lugging the dead triggerman towards a side entrance whose small plaque announced, "Service—Deliveries."

It took but a few devious minutes to find the fire stairs, to mount these stairs carrying the grisly, limp sack of what had once been human, finally reaching Six, Terry's room level. The Damp Man took his time tiptoeing down the thinly carpeted corridor until he came to the one room over whose door a transom glowed, showing there was light and life within. The Damp Man arranged Macklin at his leisure and then rapped lightly on the door. Terry's voice answered him from within almost immediately.

"Come on in! Door's open."

Remsdorf turned the knob, pushed the door ajar just enough to enable him to gently hoist Macklin through the aperture, holding him from behind and remaining, himself, out of sight. Terry was obviously expecting just what she saw.

"Frankie, lover! It didn't take you long! Did you get that fat baboon's money?"

It was perhaps only a matter of seconds that Remsdorf held the tableau, but it seemed to him much longer. And then, catering to the searching anger that her remark caused, he took his hand of support from Macklin, at the same time pushing the gunsel forward into the room.

He heard Terry's swift intake of breath. In the time that it took her to take another, the Damp Man was around the door, shutting it by leaning back across the portal with his giant weight. Terry's eyes went from the body on the floor to the looming black-clothed figure that was Remsdorf. She tried a smile, but it was a poor, weak one. Remsdorf came forward with deceptive speed for one his size and bulk.

In a second he was upon her before she had time to scream, although that would have been of little avail at this hour of night with the storm outside and the hotel's rooms that were occupied, occupied by the sleeping. In another instant, she was in his bare hands and then she knew enough to do nothing but smile up at him. She was wearing something revealing that she knew he, or any other man, would like, and she placed her life on that.

"Darling," she murmured, using all her willpower to keep the tremble out of her voice and the fear out of her eyes. "Darling, I'm *so* glad to see you!"

Remsdorf held her non-committally, and in his small opaque eyes, she could see nothing that told her what her fate might be, only a mirror of her own face with its set, frozen smile that was a terrible mask, hiding the exploding emotions within.

THE Damp Man had been thinking in his ponderous, inexorable and wholly objective manner, and little surprised him. All the time that Terry had played with him, a side of him divorced from that part of his nature which had been pleased and flattered had stood off and evaluated the situation as it really was. Earlier that night Lother had recognized that his worst suspicions were probably true. The rendezvous with Terry that turned into a rendezvous with three yeggs. But during the crosstown drive there was still in the back of his mind which desperately wanted to believe in her, the thought that possibly this Frankie Macklin and his friends had overheard, or somehow come to know about the ten thousand dollars he had withdrawn and was bringing her. That was not entirely beyond the realm of possibility, and they, rather than the girl, had kept the meeting. It was, of course, a small hope to cling to, but it had been with him until that moment when he'd stood the body of Macklin in the opening of the door and Terry had unknowingly greeted the gunsel affectionately, wondering out loud if he'd hoisted the money from "that big baboon."

It was, of course, all too plain, whether the fact was a pleasant one to accept or not. Terry played at the game of knowing nothing for a moment as she drew him back without seeming to to the corner of the room until she came up against her own dressing-table. It was a game between them, a silly game and an entirely deadly one. She used the wiles that women have used from time immemorial and which she was so naturally well-endowed to use.

She swayed her body lightly, as well as she could in his restrictive grasp and she offered her lips, closing her eyes as she did so, and behind her, she fumbled with one hand she had won free at something in her dressing-table drawer.

He slapped her first across the mouth. It was not hard, but his hand was heavy and it made a wet sound. She opened her eyes wide with the shock of the blow and saw that it was only the first, but she had what she wanted now, and when her free hand came out from behind her, it held a knife. She was sure he didn't see, his bulk looming so far above her, bending her backward.

When she struck him in the back with the blade, driving it home with all the strength of her arm, she tried to swivel side-

ways to free herself from his monstrous body when it would fall in agony from her attack. Instead, there was no more satisfying reaction on the Damp Man's part than a tightening of his hands on her shoulders. It was incredible to her, and this part was the worst of it. Her flaying arms caught at the weapon buried to its hilt in his back. She beat at it and hammered at it, and the strange sounds in her ear was her own voice whimpering, the voice made for soft songs and foolish men, now crying and sobbing for her life.

The knife was where she had struck it, squarely beneath his shoulder blades, and its blade was long, she knew. She had a passing satisfaction as one hand came away with a wet, sticky substance soiling her fingers.

One giant hand came up again, and another heavy blow fell, making her ears ring and her senses reel. He was swinging his huge arms and fists at her ponderously, like a windmill, but somewhere her quickness and strength had left her, and though she could see the blows coming, she could not dodge them and they fell with a rhythmic tattoo upon her face and shoulders and upper body.

AS Terry slipped to the floor, hurt and sick almost beyond caring, she had time, as though in a dream, to see that hand of hers which had touched the stickiness from his back where her knife had struck. As though, in the seeing of his life's blood on her fingers, there would be some small satisfaction, she looked and knew something that made her doubt what sanity remained in her battered head. For the almost colorless substance on her fingers, whatever it may have been, was certainly not blood.

Those last seconds seemed an eternity. For a fraction of them, he left her lying where she had fallen, her clothes nearly completely ripped from her body, and he half turned for a moment for some small reason that had nothing to do with her life or his dreadful purpose concerning it.

She saw the knife end in his back, and it glinted as testimonial to her supreme failure. There was a wet stain from the rent it caused in his coat, and from that stain was more of the stuff drying on her hand. And it, too, also could not be blood.

Perhaps he caught the direction of her eyes. At any rate, he reached almost casually behind him and wrenched the knife from its lodgment in his massive body. The blade came away, but there was still no redness. She was sure of that because he was holding it as he moved closer to her and bent, almost kneeled as though in supplication, the knife in his hand as offering. She was fascinated by its unreddened blade.

From out of her youngness and woman strength that was far from its designed destiny or length of life, she summoned the energy to gasp, "You're . . . you're not human!"

He bent closer, ever closer, as though to kiss her, and as he did, he said, "No, Terry, my dear, I'm not . . . human!"

There was something else in her to be said, a plea, a begging for mercy, a promise of everything, for loss of life is the greatest loss. But if she had had the strength to say it, it would still not have been said, for the beginnings of it were ripped and torn from her very throat by her own blade as he plunged the knife into her, smashing and tearing and rending the bones and tissue and flesh of a neck that so many foolish men had worshipped.

The Damp Man's exit from a scene of crime—or as he always called such occasions, the scene of justice—was accompished with a minimum of effort, and, as usual, without observation.

LOTHER REMSDORF, JR., had been involved in much more than his share of peccadillos during his span of existence, would be involved in many more. This was his own opinion. Experience and the fortunate position of his tremendous inherited wealth had taught him that there were few scrapes from which one could not extricate oneself with the use of superior intelligence or money and influence. Some occasions took one solution; others took another. But the worst would yield to both.

As time passed, in the dark patterns of his life, Lother felt never regret, rarely sadness, but instead, a kind of bitter resent-

ment and frustration that filled the hulk of him with a burning hatred towards his less peculiarly endowed fellow men — and women. His actions became less overt and direct. He became more a recluse, and in this, a society which had never accepted his unusualness was glad to concur.

Remsdorf, at vast expense and with the utilization of every likely means, set about collecting all the data he could on the experiments of his brilliant scientist-father, Remsdorf, Sr. He was, of course, primarily and overwhelmingly interested in the facts and circumstances attendant upon the experiment whose culmination produced the knowledge that was him. Much of the data pertinent to this, as well as other of his father's scientific adventures, had been destroyed in the explosion that had cost Remsdorf, Sr., his life, and which, in later years, would be attributed to the son who, like Frankenstein's monster, had turned resentfully upon his maker.

Other levels of information which would now be invaluable to the Damp Man's investigations had undoubtedly been gathered, not on paper, but alone in the head of the scientist himself. Still, in time, Remsdorf accumulated a considerable portmanteau of details concerning the physiological, cellular and radiary aspects of altering human tissue and the organic balance between vital substances.

Through the months and the years, the Damp Man collected not only paper information and scientific data, but instruments and apparatus which he thought might eventually be useful to him. Some of these were built on unusual and outré lines, along specifications from those of his father's secret files, which he'd been able to salvage at least in part.

There were two thoughts in this connection in the back of Remsdorf, Jr.,'s mind. One was assuredly the dominant. That was his desire to perpetuate himself and to establish on this earth others of his kind. Precisely how this would be done was the subject of many of his musings and speculations. There was, of course, the orderly method of conventional, biological progression. But this was, possibly, a chance formula. The other was to subject additional human organisms to the same manmade "tampering" to which he had been subjected. And then, but only rarely, was the discreet wonder that possibly the energies that had made him what he was could be reversed, and carrying that thought to conclusion, he would, therefore, become what he had been once before in some unremembered limbo.

This last was not a matter he spent much analysis on, for in actuality, the Damp Man had come to believe supremely in his superiority; to become one of the masses would be a recession of the most shocking sort. It was his chief problem then to find one, a female of course, who would be kindred with him and who would help realize his dream of a racial and biological empire which could revolutionize our society, our mores and our destinies, not alone as individuals but as a composite universe.

TO this end, all of Remsdorf's efforts were bent, but there still remained, with the ebb and flow of success in his scientific adventures and experimentations, the quest for a girl, *the* girl. And then one day, almost as by accident, he saw a picture in a newspaper. There were other faces and figures, but he had eyes for only one, the one which even the newspaper photo showed to be golden-haired, very pretty and statuesque in proportions.

The young lady in question, the story read, was a Miss Linda Mallory, and she was competing in a swimming meet to be held in a near state, along with the others in the picture. Remsdorf was at that contest and was completely taken with the girl. He watched for her entry in future meets, and through devious means, ascertained her address at a big-city women's hotel. His campaign to meet and win the young lady for his own did not, could not, allow for defeat. To be sure, he had run across an initial rejection early in the chase. He had come upon her at one of the fashionable club pools where swimming races were being held. As nearly as it was possible for him to be so affected, the Damp Man was confused by meeting face to face this statuesque, perfectly molded, young blonde beauty. He mumbled something, al-

though, of course, they had not been introduced.

When he tried to remember afterward, he could not remember exactly what he had said, but the essence of it he could guess and it must have sounded strange to the uninitiated girl.

"Between us we can make a new world!"

She had brushed past him in some embarrassment, he had recalled. There entered into the picture not long afterward, a meddlesome young man by name, George Pelgrim, who was, Lother had to admit, a rather wily adversary in his capacity as reporter for the big metropolitan "Gazette."

He, too, met Linda Mallory, and they became acquainted, much to Remdorf's irritation. That she had told Pelgrim about her other "admirer" was evident nearly at once, for one night late in fog-filled streets, he had followed them home from a movie and had confronted the young man, who in traditional manner, had barred the way while Linda had gone on ahead. Lother had been enjoying the prospect of beating the newspaperman's brains from his head when car lights had shone through the yellow mist far down the avenue and he'd had to leave Pelgrim lying unconscious from their fight in the street but still, he was afraid, very much alive.

It was, of course, a passing irritation that he had caught up with a girl some days later who, he believed, was Linda, for was she not wearing one of Linda's dresses, which he knew well from observation? In her fear and struggling, she had made a considerable scene at a place where such commotion can cause questions and embarrassing apprehension. Then at once, Remsdorf realized that it was not Linda but another girl, of almost equal proportions, wearing an identical dress. By that time, there'd only been one thing to do and Lother had done it.

With the death of the "mixed-identity" girl, the reporter, Pelgrim's efforts to hinder Remsdorf had been redoubled. Still, he had plans for Pelgrim. His campaign for Linda was not ended. His race of "new" people would still be born.

George Pelgrim laid the diary down, but there were some immensities about this macabre situation that staggered the mind. Pelgrim went back to the diary then and pawed over some of the back pages filled with calculations, summaries, equations and formulas. Most of it was as greek to him, but here and there were conclusions worded in scientific language but still not too hard for the lay mind to comprehend.

Pelgrim read on, and it was sometime later, having exhausted the remaining pages of the journal, that he descended again into the laboratory basement of the building. It was eerie to walk in that place with its strange, damned equipment and those three grisly things on the floor. Corpses, they were. Two of them Remsdorf's gunsels who'd been brought here to guard the place, and the third, an assisting doctor in white smock who probably knew little of what he was doing but was willing to assist in anything for the sort of fee that Lother would be glad to pay.

There was, of course, the transfusion theory of Remsdorf's experimentation, but there was also what the Damp Man had somewhat sardonically called in his diary the "evolution" stage, and that was set up here like some futuristic monster, with electrons and such arrayed in twin banks complementing each other and focusing across an X middle-stage.

George was still wondering about his method, once he had quit this place for good—and that would be soon, for the first streaks of dawn would be upon him in another hour or two—of tipping off the police. An anonymous phone call, he thought, would do it. Simply the brusque message that there had been some trouble up at View Cliffs. The authorities would come and find the three bodies. Remsdorf, of course, was gone forever into the myriad moisture of the world.

Pelgrim thought that there would be nothing to implicate Linda or himself. But any thorough investigation could not fail to give them both a clean bill of health when all the facts, supported by the precious Remsdorf diary, were established. George was less sure of the attitude of the authorities on the complete disappearance of Lother Remsdorf, Jr., but that was a matter that concerned him only theoretically.

Another most practical consideration in Pelgrim's mind was how he could win approval to publish this record, the story of the infamous Damp Man and his machinations, for the yarn certainly out-thrilled fiction.

As he thought, his flashlight flicked over the apparatus of the stage. It reminded him in some ways of a giant diathermy machine. To get a better look at some of the mechanics of the machine, he stepped up on the stage, peering up at neon-signlike tentacles that reached high on either side as though to form an arbor of equipment. He was careful not to touch anything, for the exact mechanism was beyond him. This part of the Damp Man's saga smacked a bit of quackery.

George had the newspaper reporter's contempt of paraphernalia, and in this elaborate form, it reminded him of the grade-C thrillers that the moviemakers put out for years for a gullible, easily impressed audience. Craning his neck to look upward made him feel suddenly dizzy. He recalled prosaically that he hadn't eaten in many hours, and that was probably the reason for the nausea and weakness that was catching up with him.

Pelgrim stepped off the stage, noting the control box on the far side with its switch and the red lights that marked one end of its radius. But he was concerned now with getting upstairs. He went through the house quickly and quietly, visiting last the upstairs room wherein hung the huge life-size portrait of Lother Remsdorf, Jr. He, himself, would keep the diary, but it would not do to have curious police discover the lopsided, hanging picture and a small, broken wall safe behind it. He straightened the picture carefully, after having seen that the safe looked as intact as he could make it.

The picture of Remsdorf struck him again as it had before; powerfully and with impact. As he backed away almost as though with awe, he changed his opinion that the eyes had no life, for there seemed a spark in them now, and the face that had been expressionless now almost seemed to smile back at him.

He was feeling very, very tired, and his imagination was that of an exhausted man who'd known neither food nor sleep over too long a period. He made an exit from the room before, as he chided himself, Lother Remsdorf, Jr., should step out of the picture suddenly, come to life and pursue him through the dark, dead old building.

OUTSIDE, Pelgrim made his way to his parked car which had been left discreetly some distance away. He drove nearly all the way back to the city before he found an inconspicuous spot with an all-night counterman dosing on duty. With his fedora down over his eyes, George went in, made his way to the corner phone booth and phoned his tip about View Cliffs. The rest was up to the police.

He'd been in his city apartment only a few minutes when his phone jangled. It was Linda who'd come on ahead of him and was now safely ensconced again at Mrs. Brumley's boarding house.

"Darling, are you all right?"

"Of course," he told her. "You ought to be asleep at this hour!" Dawn was at his windows as he spoke. "Although it's just about time for a new day, isn't it?"

They talked of this and that, and for some reason, George said nothing about the diary or of his return visit to View Cliffs.

"I thought you'd been out on an all-night bender or something," she chided him.

"Celebrating my near-demise at the hands of that monster?" His laugh was a little hollow. It *had* been a close escape. "For a young lady who almost contributed to an unusual experience . . ." he kidded back, striking the same light vein, ". . . you're remarkably gay!"

"It's because we're free of him," she said fervently. "Free of him forever, George. We don't have to sneak around anymore or phone each other from paybooths and not get together for fear he's watching or following! He's gone forever, George!"

"That's right," said Pelgrim. "He's gone forever. Now try and get some sleep, Linda."

There were a few more endearments and then they hung up. It was true, what Linda Mallory had said. They could walk arm-in-arm anywhere they pleased, day or night,

down bright or dark streets, without looking behind, without wondering at every step that beat in rhythm with their own, without wondering if the chance glance of a passer-by might betoken some agent directed by *him*.

It was as Linda said, as though they had come out from under a giant cloud, as though they had walked through a dark, evil forest and emerged into the sunlight and joy of these years of youth that were still theirs.

Her face was radiant as she'd look at him and squeezed his arm affectionately.

"I suppose . . ." the blonde girl would convey, ". . . I suppose I'll never forget that business, nor you, George. I might on the surface, but not way down deep inside. They say that everything that happens to you is recorded there forever, but even now, and it's only a few weeks ago, the last of it, even now it seems a dream, like something that happened to someone else, something that I've been told about that didn't really happen to me! You know what I mean?"

And George would nod his head. And Linda, like people in love, would poke at him playfully and say with mock petulance:

"You're not even paying any attention to what I'm saying! You're thinking about something else! Now don't you go and grin sheepishly, George, and try and pretend you've been listening all the time! That's the trouble with you newspapermen. So many funny things happen to you, I suppose your little run in with my Damp Man is sort of back-page stuff to you now!'

He wagged his head non-committally.

"George," she went on. "What about getting some of that published? You know you used to say it would make such a wonderful story. Won't that old city editor of yours, or the feature editor down there take it?"

He surprised her by shaking his head.

"Things like that really shouldn't be printed, Linda. I agree with them, now."

"Well," she sighed, squeezing his elbow again lovingly, "and then they talk about women changing their minds!"

But George was thinking of something else and he'd been thinking of it for several days. It came to him first perhaps appropriately enough—don't they say that's when many men do their best thinking?—when he was shaving at his bathroom mirror.

When he left Linda this night, he went over the whole business again and read the diary as he had before now enough times to know parts of it almost by heart. The beginning, for instance. It all fitted in nicely, and he was satisfied that he had discovered the Why, as well. It made him smile to recall that only tonight Linda had taken his hand across the dinner table in a downtown cafe with a gesture of affection, and then said with that little bit of motherhen disapproval he'd always found amusing:

"George, you've been working on the office safe, or something! Your hands are all scratched up! No, you've been fighting with other girls! There's a nick on your face."

Silly girl! But of course he had had to make sure. That time, the first time, when he'd been shaving, had been so frightening, so hopefully inconclusive. You know, men cut themselves when they shave . . . blood comes . . . is *supposed* to come! Then he'd remembered, thought and thought, until the memory was clear in his mind. The stage and the apparatus and the position of the switch on the far side. How was he to know there would be no loud impressive hum of machinery, sparks flying, or wires glowing. But the switch had pointed to two red letters on its control face, two red letters pregnant with meaning . . . "ON."

He watched. Once and a while he nicked a finger. Just to make sure; he was sure. As the days had passed though, something else had happened to him, which, he supposed, went with it all. For now he was no longer frightened or stunned, and he knew the next step with simple positiveness.

Tomorrow he would ask Linda. And of course her answer would be "Yes." And that would be the beginning.

Matthew South and Company

A game of whist with three men quite out of this world . . . but they were good card players!

Heading by John Giunta

By Carl Jacobi

IN THE Trinidad statistical offices at Port-of-Spain his birth was recorded in the year 1907 under the name of Henry Gibson Walters. It was a good name with representatives of every generation for the past two hundred years having done their share to establish its history of honest endeavor and character. True, the Walters had never accomplished anything dramatic or exciting, but they had been good tradesmen, good barristers, good scholars. Yet Henry Walters disliked the name fervently, and it was a quirk of his that he avoided using it on every occasion he could.

Not that he ever resorted to forgery or anything of the kind, of course. He simply liked the sound and connotation of odd names, and he was forever making up different combinations and using them for such harmless things as subscriptions, delivered packages and personal stationery.

Walters received *Punch* and *The Fortnightly Review* under the name of James K. Vermont. He had an extra library card made out to Philip Spayne, and he carried on various correspondence with the signature, Richard Campeau. Just why he did these things he did not exactly know, although he suspected, not unwisely, that it was the result of a mild frustration.

This frustration, however, was not financial, for he enjoyed a splendid income from his sugar mill and he lived in an imposing villa in the fashionable St. Clair district of Port-of-Spain. He lived alone, excepting his servants, his wife having passed on several years before. With plenty of free time, he spent the hours devising new names and, incidentally, characters to go with them.

He liked to think of James K. Vermont as an American sportsman, for example, a carefree fellow who played polo and rode with grace and ease. In Philip Spayne—a good example of euphony with its "l" and "n" sound—he saw a polished and cultured student of crime detection, a gentleman sleuth who solved his cases with the aid of erudite dissertations on Egyptian hieroglyphics or Polynesian philosophy. It was a curious fact, however, that in signing these names Walters did not consider himself directly in the role associated with them. He was inclined to view those mystic personages as entities closely related to his own personality, yet apart and separate.

One blistering hot day in February Walters sat in his library engaged in his favorite past time. The French windows were open to the garden and through them wafted the smell of hibiscus, magnolia and tarter bush. In his notebook Walters scribbled several names which his surroundings suggested to him. First he wrote Arden Garden, but he crossed a line through that as being too facetious. Then he wrote Oliver Green and considered that a long moment. The play on the double color was good, but there was nothing unusual in it. After a moment he jotted down Flowers—Alexander Flowers.

Bad. It seemed he had just about utilized every likely combination during the last few years. And yet he knew that that for which he was seeking—the ultimate—had not yet occurred to him.

One name he was seeking, *the* name. It must be the essence of euphony; it must be unique and pleasing to the eye as well as to the ear. Walters knew he would have little use for such a name if and when he did find it. He was not a writer, and he certainly was not an actor. But for a long time now the lure of intellectual satisfaction had kept him searching.

THE south wind blew in fitfully from the garden, and he stirred restlessly. Abruptly he took up the pencil again and after a moment wrote *Matthew South*. Then he paused while a little thrill swept through him. Matthew South! The name was not particularly attractive. As a matter of fact, the double "th" sound gave it a lisping quality that was unpleasant and he had never cared for Matthew. But somehow the combination struck a responsive chord deep within him. Though his better judgment rebelled against it, instinct told him that he had finally hit upon the name.

He wrote it again, several times. What kind of man would Matthew South be? After a moment he smiled sheepishly. He

was taking his little hobby too seriously. Besides, it was time to make ready for his trip to the club and his regular game of whist.

He went to his room and dressed carefully: a thin, wiry man with a lean incisive face and dreamy eyes partially hidden by the newest type heavy-rimmed glasses. But instead of putting on his blue striped suit as he always did for this occasion, he found himself donning a white dinner jacket. Almost as if he expected to meet someone.

The Caribbean Club was opposite the Savannah, and Walters took a cab. Arriving, he went directly to the smoking lounge. He had reached the door and was about to open it when a small placcard caught his eye:

Closed.

Lounge Undergoing Repairs.

Damnation! He had forgotten about the new arched ceiling that was being installed, the appropriation for which he had voted himself only last week. That meant he couldn't play his regular evening game unless he went out on the terrace. And the terrace at this hour would be crowded.

He opened the door slightly and peered in. Scaffolding was lined up against the walls, ladders were scattered about, and the floor was littered with rolls of canvas and chunks of plaster. A single unshaded droplight, apparently left by some workman, illuminated the room.

But Walters saw something else, and a little murmur of satisfaction escaped him as he opened the door wider. A card table had been set up in a far corner of the room, and around it sat three men playing cards. Walters could see the men's faces vaguely; a haze of tobacco smoke coiled about the table, but all three seemed to be strangers.

"Tourists probably," Walters told himself. "Or maybe that oil men's convention from the States. Well, there should be room for a forth."

He entered the room and paced across to the table, where he stood a moment, watching the play. The three men continued passing cards back and forth across the table without looking up.

One of them, a tall man with dreamy gray eyes, studied his cards intently. His was the face of an aesthete. He was dressed conservatively in a dark suit, and he wore an espensive wrist-watch. Across from him lounged a somewhat younger man, clad in a tweed sports coat and gay colored tie. He smoked a cigarette in a long holder. His blonde hair rippled with even waves.

But it was the third man who held Walter's gaze. He was tall and dark, and he was clad in a perfect fitting double-breasted tuxedo. There was something indefinable about his eyes—a sardonic glitter that seemed to look upon the others with half amusement. Power and determination were written across that face.

Something about the men gave Walters the impression that he had known them somewhere in the past. And yet that was impossible; he had never seen any of them before.

The man in the tuxedo looked up. "Mr. Walters," he said. "Wouldn't you care to sit in for a few games?"

"You know who I am?" Walters said in some surprise.

"I wouldn't be likely not to know it."

AFTER this somewhat puzzling exchange of pleasantries, Walters found himself seated at the table, engaged in his favorite pastime, whist. He played well, and during the course of the games he won with sufficient regularity to keep his interest at the highest pitch. Indeed so great was his absorption that more than an hour passed before it dawned upon him that none of the three had made any effort to introduce himself. To ask names pointblank at this time would be a bit disconcerting, and Walters cast about for a means of accomplishing it with a minimum of embarrassment.

"You know," he said, "I'm in luck tonight. I usually play here with the same three chaps. But all three have motored up San Fernando way to do some fishing. Perhaps you know them: Parker, Stewart, and Mandon—Stephen Mandon?"

The man in the tuxedo shook his head and stood up. "I'm sorry, but I have an engagement. Perhaps we can play again tomorrow night. Ah, er . . . have you a lighter? My cigar seems to have gone out."

Walters produced a gold lighter, handed it across. The other proceeded to light his cigar. Then he nodded.

"Well, cherio."

He stepped briskly to the door and was

passing through it when Walters remembered his lighter.

"I say . . . Just a moment. . . ." He started after him.

The lounge opened directly on the Club lobby, and as Walters strode rapidly into the latter room now, he found his way blocked by a number of friends who had come in from the terrace. Several moments passed before he was able to break away. When he did, there was no sign of the man in the tuxedo. Then Walters saw him.

He was bent over a little table by the entrance, writing in the guest book. Walters strode forward, but even as he did, the man tossed down the pen and passed hatless out into the street.

Walters swore. He reached the guest book table and glanced curiously down at the open page. An instant later he rocked backward while a shock swept through him from head to foot.

In still wet ink the written words read: *Matthew South and Company.*

Somebody with a perverted sense of humor must be pulling his leg. Or could it be coincidence, iron coincidence that defied all the laws of chance? For a long moment Walters stood there, a thousand mad thoughts racing through his brain. Abruptly he swung about and retraced his steps to the lounge. He must ask the other two men how it happened that their companion bore a name he had so recently fashioned out of his fancy.

He entered the lounge and drew up short. The two men had vanished!

AT HOME that night Walters tried to tell himself that he must have seen the name, Matthew South, in the newspaper and recalled it out of his subconscious by a simple process of sight or sound association. But he knew that wasn't so. He cared little for the ordinary run-of-the-mill events that took place in Port-of-Spain, and he seldom troubled to look at the local paper.

In deep thought, he undressed slowly. But before retiring he experienced a desire to see again how that magic name looked in writing. Accordingly, he decended to his library, sat down before the desk and reached for his notebook.

The notebook was not in the drawer. Nor was it on the desk top, nor in the filing basket. He glanced at the open window across the room and suddenly remembered. He had left the book on the edge of the desk just above the wastebasket. The wind must have blown it into the basket, and his old Negro servant, Benjamin, must have emptied the basket, following his daily custom.

Walters rose, crossed the room and tugged at the bell-pull. But even as he did, he remembered that Benjamin was no longer with him. The old servant had finally become too feeble, and he had been forced to hire a younger man to care for his personal needs. The newcomer, a Haitian black who went by the simple name of Kingsley, was not exactly satisfactory. He had brought with him its native voodoo religion, and he had insisted on practicing it at the most outlandish times.

Twice when he had had guests in for the evening, Walters had been disconcerted to hear a low moaning chant coming from the servants' quarters, accompanied by the muted throb of a drum. On three separate occasions he had come upon the black crouched in supplication before a crudely carved wooden image, the head of which was apparently fashioned of human hair. Walters had spoken sharply to Kingsley the first few times. After that, whenever he saw any evidences of the Negro's superstition, he had lost his temper and utilized his cane to discourage further actions.

A step sounded in the outer corridor and Kingsley entered the room. He was a tall, well-built Negro with almost Caucasian features and a sly look in his eyes.

"Did you empty the wastebasket?" Walters demanded.

"Yes, sar." Kingsley nodded unemotionally.

"Did you see my notebook in it?"

"Notebook?" The Negro looked puzzled.

"A small book with leather covers."

"No, sar."

It was impossible to tell whether the fellow was lying or not, but the matter wasn't worth further argument. Walters nodded in dismissal, switched off the lights and returned to his bedroom.

He fell asleep almost at once and began to dream a strangely vivid dream. It seemed

that his head had but touched the pillow when he got slowly out of bed and descended the stairs again to the library. There he began a systematic search for his notebook, though all the while he was conscious that it wasn't there. At length he sat down before his desk, took up pen and paper and began to write. But this was the queer part of the dream: He wrote only one name over and over again.

In the morning when he awoke he became aware of a strange lethargy and a lameness of his right wrist. But when he went into the library to open his morning mail he received a profound shock. There was a sheet of writing paper on the desk top, and it had been written upon so many times, the surface was almost black with ink. Words were distinguishable here and there, however, and he could see the name, Matthew South, copied again and again.

WALTERS spent a miserable day. At his sugar mill office he caught himself beginning his dictating, "Mr. M. South," and then had to go back and consult his memo pad for the correct name of the addressee. His secretary looked at him queerly.

But other names seemed to sound in his brain: Philip Spayne and James K. Vermont, the two pseudonyms he had used most frequently in his harmless pastime. And as these two names came before him, he caught himself thinking in this manner: Spayne would be a private investigator, a detective; Vermont, a rich sportsman; but what the devil is Matthew South?

Dressing for the club again that night, Walters rang for his servant, Kingsley. The Negro did not answer the summons, and Walters, his temper already on edge from the bewildering chain of recent events, strode savagely in search of him. He found the black in his room in the left wing. Kingsley was squatting in the center of the floor. Before him he had traced in chalk a rude circle, and in the center of that circle was a little pile of dirt, some broken eggshells and what appeared to be several small bones. But it was the object that lay a little to the side that caught Walters' eye. His notebook, open to its last page of written names.

Walters stood there, watching the Negro raise his hands and chant in supplication. Then, white with rage, he swept his foot through the debris on the floor and brought his clenched fist crashing down upon Kingsley's head.

"I told you I'd stand for no more of this tomfoolery, and I won't tolerate your lying either. What are you doing with my notebook?"

The Negro's eyes blazed. He said nothing while Walters placed the book in his pocket and strode to the door, ordering him "to clean up this mess."

All the way to the club Walters relived the unpleasant incident, and his anger was slow to die. Damned superstitious heathens! If there was anything that irritated him, it was the stupid persistence of these West Indians in reverting to the black rites of their ancestors.

Entering the club lobby, he advanced to the desk and inquired if the three men with whom he usually played—Parker, Stewart, and Mandon—had returned from their San Fernando fishing trip. The regular clerk, however, was not on duty and the new man didn't seem to know. Walters headed for the lounge.

The placard notifying guests that the room was closed for repairs was still on the door. Inside the single drop-light was lit over the card table, but there was no sign of the three men Walters had played with the night before. Nevertheless he entered the room and strode forward hesitantly. A deck of cards lay on the table. He picked them up idly, thumbed through them, then sat down and began playing solitaire.

As he played, he was vaguely conscious of a far-off ringing sound. He glanced over his shoulder but saw nothing. The ringing persisted. Walters looked again and out of the corner of his eye saw a telephone on the floor left apparently by the workmen after removing the room's furniture. He moved swiftly to the instrument, lifted the receiver and said, "Hello."

A voice began speaking, but it was so remote as to be almost inaudible.

"Speak louder," Walters said. "I can't hear you."

"This is Philip Spayne talking, one of the three men who played cards with you last evening."

"Philip Spa!"

"Please listen closely. I have followed Matthew South down here from Havana, where he is wanted for a serious crime. In a few moments South will enter the lounge for another game. This is to put you on your guard. Watch yourself but say nothing to anybody."

The connection was severed with a click, and Walters stood there, a man in a daze. First Matthew South, now Philip Spayne, two names which he had created out of his fancy, come to life. Was he quite mad? Had he lost his mental equilibrium and imagined the whole thing.

He strode out of the lounge and back into the lobby. Beside the clerk's desk he said to the telephone operator. "Could you tell me where that last call came from, the one you put through to the lounge?"

The girl stared. "The lounge is closed," she said.

"I know, but. . . ."

"And the phone there has been disconnected."

Cold sweat broke out on Walter's forehead. Yet when he reentered the lounge his perturbation passed, and a feeling of inner quiet stole over him. Almost as he had expected, the three men were there, seated about the card table. For a brief instant he thought the three were Parker, Stewart, and Mandon, his usual game companions. Then he saw that they were the men of the night before.

The man who called himself Matthew South, spoke

"Good evening, Mr. Walters. Would you care to sit in."

AGAIN the game was whist, but as he drew and discarded cards, Walters got the feeling that he was playing by himself and that the three were phantoms seated about the table. Once South called the man opposite "Mr. Spayne," and once that individual referred to the third member of the group as "Mr. Vermont." Walters by this time was beyond all stages of bewilderment. He played liked an automaton.

At length Matthew South stood up. "I've had enough," he said. "Going for a stroll. Coming, any of you?"

The man called Spayne shook his head, but Vermont nodded. "Don't mind if I do," he said.

Walters found himself joining the two. They left the club and began to walk slowly down Queen's Park West, heading toward Port-of-Spain's open park, the Savannah. The night was dark, and as the street lights dropped behind, fireflies began to dot the blackness. From the hedges flanking the walk came the warm odor of hibiscus.

None of them spoke. South puffed slowly at a cigar, and Vermont paced along, apparently absorbed in the beauties of the night. The impression was still with Walters that he moved beside two phantoms, that any moment there would be a little click of the space-time element, and he would find his companions not these two strangers but his old friends, Parker and Stewart or Mandon.

Abreast of the darkened race-track grandstand South suddenly came to a halt. Without warning he stooped and picked up a flat slab of rock. Silently he placed the rock in Walter's hands. Vermont who had paced on a short distance turned, but before he turned, South pointed at the man's figure and suddenly commanded;

"Throw!"

Something whirred inside Walter's head. The word was magnetic and the compulsion was overwhelming. He brought his arm back and threw the stone straight at Vermont.

As in a daze he saw Vermont collapse on the walk, blood streaming from his head. Matthew South turned and without further word began to walk rapidly back toward the club.

Walters stood there a long moment before the utter horror closed in upon him. Then he turned and ran.

He reached his house in a state of exhaustion. As the quiet of the old building closed in on him, he told himself that he couldn't possibly have committed the crime. It was all his nerves. The responsibilities of his sugar mill had been weighing heavily upon him of late. He must take a few weeks off, perhaps go some place for a rest.

But suppose he hadn't imagined the incident and the man lay dead there now on the walk. Shouldn't the police be informed? How could he tell them that the man's

name was a name which he had used on his own library card?

He went to bed at length and lapsed into a heavy slumber from which a single dream rose to torment him. Again he saw himself descending the stairs to the library, open his notebook which he had returned to the desk and begin to write at a feverish pace. Morning, and he awoke to a gloomy rain-swept day, with low-hanging clouds. But if his dream had been the result of another sleep-walking episode, there was no evidence of any writing on his desk. Only several pages had been ripped from his notebook, but he might have done that himself some time in the past.

To Walters' overwhelming relief the morning newspaper contained nothing of a murdered man found near the Savannah. A growing fear of his sanity began to gnaw far back in a corner of his mind, and he set about re-reading and filing some old correspondence—anything to steer his thoughts into other channels.

He read and tossed letters aside for more than a half hour before he came upon one from his old card-game friend, Stewart. It read in part:

". . . answering your question as to whether I can recommend a good man servant. It so happens that my own man has a brother who goes by the name of Kingsley whom I would recommend with some reservations.

"Kingsley served me for a brief period when the chap I regularly employ was ill. He was also employed for a while by our mutual friends, Parker and Mandon. I think they will agree with me that he does his duties efficiently, and if you can put up with his spells of voodooism, he shouldn't cause you too much trouble.

"My advice is the same as Parker's. If he does show any voodooistic tendencies, simply give him a sound thrashing. Mandon told me he whipped the fellow within an inch of his life, as did Parker, and this apparently ended Kingsley's fanaticism.

Walters laid the letter down and sobered perceptibly. He didn't exactly agree with his three friends in their old-fashioned "Empire" attitude toward the Trinidad blacks. In his case he had chastised Kingsley several times, but always afterward he had experienced a feeling of regret and disgust for his actions.

WALTERS had difficulty in concentrating on his work the next day. At noon he received a telephone call from his old friend, Warrant Officer Hugh Edmonds.

"It's about your man, Kingsley," Edmonds said. "We've been watching him. He's been acting queer of late. Did you know he leaves your house every night about midnight?"

"He does?" said Walters. "Where does he go?"

"That's the funny part of it. He goes straight to the cemetery and prowls around there for a half hour or so. So far all we've been able to find on him is a little box of grave dirt, but you never can tell about these West Indians. Anyway I thought I'd tell you."

"I'm glad you did," said Walters. "I'll speak to him."

With the press of other business matters, however, he forgot about it. Then once again he left the house and headed for the club. As his cab drove off, he thought he saw a man leave by the side entrance and walk rapidly down the walk. It wasn't Kingsley, and Walters told himself that he must be mistaken.

At the club his experience was similar to the night before. He entered the closed lounge and saw the card table with the single droplight. Only one man sat there this time. For a brief instant Walters thought it was Stewart. Then he saw that it was the man who called himself Philip Spayne.

As Walters sat down, Spayne leaned forward and spoke huskily.

"South will be here in a moment. Try and act calm. I have evidence against him, and I'll have extradition papers by morning. "Im not sure whether or not he suspects me."

A moment later South came in, slightly breathless. "Gentlemen," he said, "I've just arranged to purchase a piece of property up by San Fernando. It may be worthless, but I'm led to believe there's oil on it. Would you two care to drive into town with me and witness the transaction?"

Walters started to decline, but as he glanced across the table, Spayne gave him a slow nod. Walters wondered if this were the same property Stewart had told him he was interested in buying. Stewart too had said something about oil, he recollected.

They entered a cab and headed down Queen's Park West. Walters sat between the two men, and glancing at Spayne, he saw that the man was watching Matthew South and that he kept his right hand in his coat pocket.

Down Frederick Street, across Marine Square and up Weighton Road the cab sped. The streets grew darker, more deserted as they approached the waterfront. Warehouses took the place of shops, and the mingled smells of salt water and rotting wood filled the air.

Before a dark, ramshackle building the cab drew up at length. Matthew South got out quickly, waited for the other two to join him. Every instinct now warned Walters to be on his guard. He was mad to come here like this, and yet he realized he had been drawn by a great lure, a lure that seemed to emanate from Matthew South's strange personality.

"In here, gentlemen," South said quietly.

He stood aside, waiting for them to pass, but Spayne, eyes narrowed, motioned to lead the way. In that instant South's hand brushed against Walter's placed there a short wooden cudgel. Then South was opening the door, stepping into a black passageway. Spayne followed a step behind, but as Walters passed across the threshold, he heard South's voice utter a sharp command.

"Now!"

Red fire lanced into Walter's brain. Another will seemed to take control of his arm, drew it high over his head. Then silently with a little murmur of submission, he brought the cudgel crashing down upon Spayne's head.

The horror that welled over him was slow in coming. Walters stood there, aware that Matthew South had stepped casually by him and regained the street.

He turned and charged out the door. Halfway up the dark street he saw South running silently, head down, shoulders hunched forward. Walters leaped in pursuit.

. He ran on and on. He crossed streets and avenues, while his heart began to labor and his lungs became a steady pain in his chest. The fleeing figure did not look back. Finally he disappeared into the darkness.

AN HOUR later Walters entered his house. Somewhere back in the silent streets he had lost his hat; his hair as disheveled, and his eyes were bloodshot. He had come here mechanically, like a homing pigeon, after all efforts to capture Matthew South had failed.

But again as he entered the quiet of the house, he found himself refusing to believe the events of the evening had actually happened. The first thing in the morning he must make an appointment with that new psychiatrist in Port-of-Spain; these things must be common in our modern hypertensive world and not impossible to cure.

He went up to his bedroom, changed his clothes and donned his favorite dressing robe. He lit his pipe deliberately, and opened a magazine to a partially completed story. For a half hour he forced himself to read. Sweat began to ooze out on his forehead, and his heart gradually increased its pulsations.

A sound entered his thoughts. Below him he heard a knocking on the front door of the house. Then he heard the latch tried, the door opened, and footsteps crossing the lower floor corridor. There was only one person among his acquaintances—Stewart—who knew him well enough to enter his house uninvited. And Stewart was still on his fishing trip. *Unless it was the police!*

A wild sense of self preservation seized him. He crossed to his chiffonier, opened

the middle drawer, and from under a neat pile of shirts, took out an automatic revolver, an old style Webley-Scott British Navy regulation. A gleam of cunning was in his eyes now as he checked to see that the gun had a full clip. Then he crossed to the door and slowly descended the staircase. At the entrance to the library he paused, listening. An instant later he was inside, advancing to the center of the room.

"Good evening, Walters."

Matthew South sat there in the chair opposite the desk. His legs were crossed, and he was slumped back comfortably against the cushions.

As he stood there, silently answering the man's gaze, all the hatred Walters had for him welled to the surface. In his mind's eye he saw again the two murder attacks which South had compelled him to make. He remembered the man's diabolic lack of emotion.

"What's wrong, Walters?"

Calmly and deliberately, Walters raised the revolver. He fired, and after the jarring recoil of the weapon saw the man in the chair slump backward. A round red-rimmed hole appeared in his forehead from which blood began to pour viscously.

Walters staggered back across the room to the settee and collapsed upon it. His mind was a great maw of emptiness now; he saw nothing, heard nothing but the quiet ticking of the pendulum clock.

Sixty seconds passed, and then as the room returned to reality once more, he found himself staring at the dead man in the chair. His body seemed to have grown bulkier, his nose more aquiline, his eyes deeper-set and more heavily browed. His hair too had taken on a reddish tint whereas before it had been a jet black. As Walters looked and noted these changes, a sudden suspicion began to clamor for recognition far back in a corner of his mind. He got to his feet and walked closer to the dead man. Then suddenly a scream rose to his lips.

It was Stewart who sat there lifeless before him! Not Matthew South, but his old friend and companion, Stewart!

THE Walters' Affair, as it came to be known, raised a furor in Caribbean Club circles. Mr. Hornby, the club secretary, discussed it for almost an hour with a group of members on the terrace the Friday evening after the night Walter's and Stewart's bodies were found. With Walters, it was obviously a case of suicide, for the gun was still clenched in his hand. But with Stewart, there was a lot left to be explained.

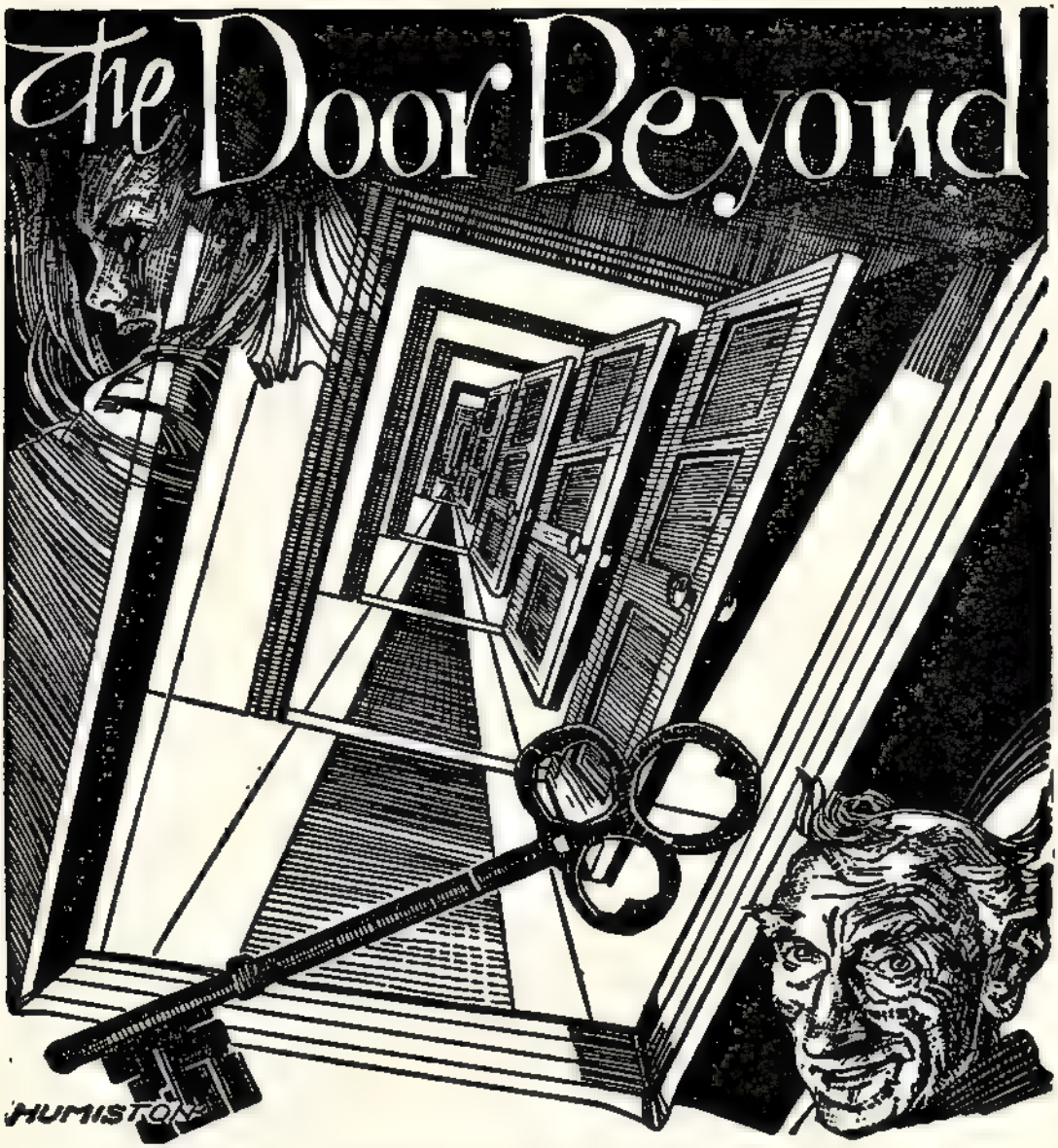
"I can't understand it," Hornby said. "I can't offer the slightest reason for Walters murdering his three friends, Stewart, Parker and Mandon. There's absolutely no motive."

"Are the police sure he killed Parker and Mandon too?" a guest asked.

"Beyond a doubt. No one saw those two crimes, of course, but Walters' fingerprints were found on the rock and the wooden cudgel that were used to club Parker and Mandon to death. He must have been mad; that's the only answer tenable. For what other reason would he have sat in the lounge playing cards with them on two successive nights and then killed two of them—Parker and Mandon—during a stroll through the city streets. Parker's body, you know, was found in the bushes near the race track grand-stand where he had apparently crawled after being struck. But Mandon was found in the doorway of a warehouse near the waterfront."

"What will happen to Walters' servants now that he's dead?" another guest queried.

Hornby frowned. "Look for new employment, I suppose. All except Walters' man, Kingsley. He seems to have disappeared."



BY HAROLD LAWLOR

OLD MR. GALLOWAY liked the picture the first time he saw it, odd as it indubitably seems; for it was a strange modern thing, that painting, bizarre in subject, color and treatment. It should have held for him, you would have thought, no possible affinity.

Yet he liked it.

But because he had grown wise in the ways of managing his wife, the young and beautiful and brittle Sylvia, he had pretended to find fault with it, though.

"What's it a painting of, anyway?" he inquired. "Nothing, really."

Beyond the beyond is something else and something else beyond that . . .

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

"Is that so?" said Sylvia, nettled. "It's called *The Door Beyond,* and it's beautiful. It ought to be, I paid enough for it! Malot painted it, and he's famous. Everybody who knows anything at all is talking about his work these days."

"I wouldn't give it house room," said Old Mr. Galloway mildly.

"Oh, wouldn't you?" At any hint of opposition, Sylvia invariably reverted to the manners of the class and background from which she had sprung. She stood there now, hands on hips, fishwife fashion, forgetting in her irritation to keep her voice so carefully modulated as she had learned to do. "What do you know about Art, anyway? The painting stays there, see, and so I tell you!"

And so it did, just as Old Mr. Galloway had cannily planned from the beginning.

"More than one way of skinning a cat," he chuckled to himself frequently thereafter, remembering the success of his ruse. Had he expressed a liking for the picture, Sylvia perversely would have hurled it to the winds, just for the sheer pleasure of thwarting him.

He knew his Sylvia, or thought he did, yet he bore her no malice. Hers was, he reasoned gently, only the natural impatience of the young with the old.

It had been a most unfortunate marriage, everyone had thought at the time. He'd been a fool, had Old Mr. Galloway, they said. A bachelor for many years while he amassed all that money, he had made one of those sudden, unpredictable marriages that many old bachelors of sixty-five do. Sylvia was many years his junior, and from a background none too prepossessing.

Still, orchids had been found on dungheaps ere this, or so he must have reasoned. The trouble was, that cultivate herself sedulously as she would and did, traces of the slime from which she had sprung seemed still to adhere to the beautiful Sylvia, and he had begun to suspect at last that it was ineradicable.

He had known from the first week of their marriage that she did not love him, as she had professed to do. While this was a blow, for he had believed her, he came in time to accept it philosophically, for he was a humble man, despite his wealth, and deemed it due to some lack in himself that he was unable to inspire love. Perhaps he had hoped for too much. Wasn't it enough that he had her respect, her gratitude for the things he had done for her?

With these, he was determined to be content.

And so, with an ailing heart that must be pampered, and while Sylvia ranged the town of nights with this young swain or that, Old Mr. Galloway remained at home, seeking therein such sources of amusement as he might find. He read a great deal, and he had his library of recorded music, but it wasn't until Sylvia bought Malot's *The Door Beyond* that Old Mr. Galloway realized here was an interest that bade fair to be inexhaustible.

MUCH too large to fit the space over the mantel, for it reached from ceiling nearly to floor, Sylvia had had *The Door Beyond* hung on the wall opposite the one along which the concert grand piano stretched its magnificent length.

On some one of the evenings during the course of that first week after the picture was hung, Old Mr. Galloway gradually became aware that it was usurping more than a little of his interest. How often on this past few nights had he found he was no longer reading the book he held in his hands, or listening to the music from the phonograph! His eyes and attention had strayed of themselves to focus upon the painting by Malot. It seemed to have an irresistible attraction for him, and presently he began to neglect his books and records entirely to ponder the puzzle of just what it was about the painting that held him so in thrall.

This was the beginning of his real interest.

For he was a man who liked order and method, and a reason for everything he did. If he liked the picture, and he really did, he had to find out why. And when he realized that it wasn't going to be easy, he acknowledged an immense debt of gratitude to the painting by Malot. For when you're too much alone, you learn to be grateful for any crumb of diversion to occupy your

mind, to keep depressing thoughts at bay.

The Door Beyond was a picture of nothing, really, as he had pointed out truly enough to Sylvia in the beginning. It was nothing, more nor less, than a segment of a room that contained no furniture. There was a carpeted floor, a painted wall upon which hung no pictures or ornaments, and in the painted wall was set a door ajar. Beyond the slightly open door could be seen a second room exactly like the first, and beyond that a third, a fourth, a fifth. And on, and on. All of them alike, every room.

It should have palled upon the viewer monotonously, but somehow it didn't. At least the painting never bored Old Mr. Galloway.

For a while he thought it was because of the unusual combination of colors it contained that he liked it. The painted rug of velvety texture was tangerine; the section of wall chartreuse; the slightly open door a brilliant chrome yellow.

He was not hasty. He gave much thought to this. But no, he decided finally, it wasn't the colors that brought such comfort to his heart. And he was secretly glad and relieved that the search for the reason for his infatuation must yet continue.

So intrigued was he by the puzzle that he began to spend every night in the living room viewing the picture, until at last Sylvia noticed his preoccupation.

She was in the living room with him, for once, but only because she was impatiently awaiting the current young man who was coming to take her to the theater. The young man was late, and Sylvia was feeling frustrated. She had to snap at someone, and her husband had the virtue of being handy. Her eyes narrowed as she saw how completely unaware of her he was.

"You give me the creeps!" he announced suddenly into the silence, her tongue tipped in vitriol. "You sit there staring at that painting as if you were hypnotized! What are you gawping at, anyway? I thought you said you hated the thing."

Old Mr. Galloway's muscles were too well trained to betray his dismay. He had forgotten Sylvia's presence entirely, so complete had been his absorption. Now she must be disarmed, and at once, for she'd sell the painting or give it away, he feared, if she once suspected how much it meant to him.

He laughed shortly. "Hate it? And so I do, my dear. I merely amuse myself by thinking of the various ways in which I should like to destroy it, if I dared."

"If you dared," Sylvia sneered. "Well, I should think so. I'd like to see you try it. That picture is mine, and I adore it."

"Is that a fact, my dear?"

But she saw that he answered her absently. His attention was riveted on the picture. He was certainly behaving in a most peculiar fashion. She would have replied angrily, but the bell rang just then, restoring her to a semblance of good humor. It was her newest escort, a slender, dark, somewhat furtive-faced young man.

Old Mr. Galloway acknowledged the introduction hazily. Michael Somebody-or-Other. He was no longer very good at catching names. Still, it didn't matter, for the young couple left immediately. He was glad when they'd gone, and he was left alone with the painting, free to give it his undivided interest.

That was the night he discovered the first of its secrets, the quality there was about it that brought him comfort.

IF IT wasn't the colors, then what was it? Absorbedly, he resumed his nightly game. He inched the great wing chair about until it faced the painting, and seated himself therein, his gold-headed cane readily to hand. Now then, he thought, when this was accomplished.

What about the subject matter? The slightly open door, and the door beyond that, and the door beyond that, stretching on and on endlessly to—

Infinity!

How stupid of him not to have seen long before this! It was a picture of infinity, that was all. And in suggesting illimitable space, it also carried with it implications of immeasurable peace.

Why, of course! In his excitement, Old Mr. Galloway grabbed his cane and pounded the thick carpet with it. Peace, that was it! That was what had enthralled him.

For he had known anything but peace these last few years. Oh, he shouldn't complain, he supposed, when there were so many people far worse off than he. But he'd been nagged by the annoyance of a body no longer equal to the demands he'd like to put upon it, harried by the idea that he'd long since outlived his usefulness, depressed by the thought that he kept Sylvia, poor child, a loyal but unwilling prisoner at his side.

No wonder he had liked the picture! It brought him peace.

Afterward, the inevitable reaction to his excitement set in. He had been pleased with his discovery, but now he was sorry he had found the secret of the picture's fascination for him, for he feared its charm would be lost. Evening after dreary evening stretched before him, with only his books and records once more to divert him. He felt as if he'd lost a friend.

But he was enchanted to learn on subsequent nights that this was not so, to learn on an evening one week later that far from exhausting the painting's possibilities for entertainment, he had only begun to probe them.

ON THAT later evening, he was again alone. Sylvia was out with Michael, who seemed to wear better than her previous swains, for never before had she gone out with the same man twice, while this was her fourth or fifth engagement with Michael. Perhaps Old Mr. Galloway might have wondered about this, had his preoccupation with *The Door Beyond* been less intense.

In the past he had always studied the painting while every light in the room was ablaze, but tonight he was moved to turn out every lamp save one, the bronze gallery light that hung directly over the picture. It had occurred to him that perhaps under other lighting the picture would reveal some fresh facet to intrigue him.

Then he settled himself in the great wing chair that stood now always drawn up facing the painting.

There are times since when he wonders if he could have dozed off for a while that evening. Certainly he seems to be dimly conscious of a hazy blank in his memory, during which anything could have happened. The thing was, once he realized he was again aware sharply of the painting, he noticed that in the dim light its outlines seemed to be quivering. And it surely appeared, from this distance at which he sat, that the painted door was swaying back and forth a very little, as if in a gentle breeze.

At first he hesitated to believe the evidence of his eyes. But as the impression of a gently swaying door remained clearly with him, Old Mr. Galloway hoisted himself at last to his feet, and moved nearer to the painting. Something within him impelled him to stretch out his hand to the door's painted knob, and that was when he made the unique discovery that caused him to draw in his breath sharply.

He felt his hand close around the cold metal of an actual door-knob.

Even as he stood there, unbelieving, the door-knoz slipped from his hand as the entire painting miraculously acquired a real dimension of depth, instead of a painted one that was only illusory.

Quite without conscious volition, Old Mr. Galloway felt himself stepping up and through the frame until he was entirely in the room painted by Malot.

He was almost childishly pleased with his discovery. He touched the painted wall before him, felt the soft rug under his feet. The room in which he stood, he now noticed, extended beyond the sides of the frame, once you were within it, and was lost in shadows at either side.

And he saw another thing that had escaped his notice until now. While the painted door had a lock, the artist had failed to provide it with a key. Old Mr. Galloway touched the door-knob, but strangely enough he made no move to open the door further or to go through it into the next room.

But he did a thing then that was to worry him later. He followed no conscious prompting of his mind. He just did it automatically.

Stepping again through the frame into his own living room and making no attempt at further explorations, Old Mr. Galloway went to the kitchen, and found himself a piece of paraffin that the cook had used to

seal jelly glasses. Heating this a very little in a saucepan, and afterward molding it in his hands until it was soft and pliable, he returned to the painting, stepped through the frame, and commenced to take a wax impression of the lock of the door that contained no key.

And the very next morning, still acting like a man performing a direction given him under hypnosis, he went out to a locksmith and had a key made from the wax impression.

It was this that later made him wonder if he were losing his mind.

Now just why did I do that? he fretted. Why should I want a key to the lock of that door?.

It troubled him that he should perform an action so irrational, for he feared it was evidence of a growing senility. As was his wont, he strove mightily to discover some semblance of a reason why he should have wanted the key; but if he had one, it continued maddeningly to elude him. And then at last he remembered how often in the past actions of his friends had seemed to him erratic and inexplicable, only because he himself had not known the perfectly valid reason that had motivated them.

"That's it." He felt somewhat comforted. "I must have a reason, and the fact that I can't discover it for myself must mean that it's not a conscious reason, but was prompted by, and is known only to, my subconscious. No doubt in its own good time it will swim upward into the light."

And with this self-explanation he contented himself.

OLD MR. GALLOWAY no longer feared loneliness. Indeed, it was a condition to be sought after now, as one might seek the Grail. He could hardly wait for Sylvia to leave on her nightly search for pleasure, for she was the only one who ever disturbed him. He had long since given the servants explicit instructions never to bother him after dinner.

Every evening, then, once he was safely alone, he stepped through the frame into the painting. And never did the painting fail him, never did he fail to feel a peace that was balm to his soul.

While he explored the first room even into the shadows at either side, curiously enough he never entered the room beyond that one, or any of the endless others, all so exactly like the first room in which he stood. But he himself did not feel that this lack of enterprise on his part was curious. It was clear in his own mind that he had no particular desire to go beyond that first door, or even the slightest inclination to do so.

At last there came a night when Old Mr. Galloway, lost as usual in the shadows at the side of the painted room, heard Sylvia and Michael enter the real living room beyond the frame. Never had they returned so early before. For a moment he felt his heart flutter like a small trapped animal's, until he realized that of course they couldn't see him there. He would just wait until the room was clear. He had no wish to eavesdrop, but he couldn't make his presence known, for he had no intention of betraying the painting's secret even to Sylvia, much less Michael.

Sylvia's voice came clear and brittle as crystal.

"The old goat must have gone to bed."

Old Man Galloway stiffened in disbelief, hidden there in the shadows. Surely she couldn't mean him? Surely she never spoke like that of him to others?

A low ripple of baritone laughter came from Michael. "A fine way to refer to the husband of your bosom," he mocked, "after he lifted you into the lap of luxury."

Sylvia giggled. " 'I'm only a bird in a gilded cage'."

"Honestly, honey, I don't see how you can stand living with Methuselah. Or why you stay with him, now that you have what you want. Of course, he has been generous, and I suppose you're grateful."

"Why should I be?" Sylvia sniffed. "He's lucky I married him! As to why I stay—well, I wouldn't tell everyone. But with you I can let down my back hair, for you knew me when. The thing is, Michael darling, the old boy has provided me with a background. I had a lot to learn, and I'm learning. A few years with him, and then—there are younger men, you know, with even more money. Snobs who wouldn't have looked at Sylvia

Propac, but who'd be glad enough to marry the dashing ex-Mrs. Galloway."

"The gal has a brain!" Michael applauded. "And then? Will I still be around, just to keep life from growing too dull for you, as I'm doing now?"

"Well," Sylvia giggled again, "what do you think?"

IN HIS mind's eye, Old Mr. Galloway could see her smiling up invitingly at Michael. There was silence for a while then and he knew that they were kissing, those two in the room beyond his vision.

So. She didn't love him. She didn't respect him. No trace of self-pity colored Old Mr. Galloway's thought; no hint of the plaintive. It was an observation, merely. A simple recognition of fact. These were things that he could have borne, for which he might have found excuses.

But at the thought that she wasn't even even grateful to him for the things he had done, the drab life from which he had taken her, he felt rising within him the righteous wrath of a generous man.

Perhaps he would have confronted them then, shamed Sylvia with his presence, had he not heard her sudden gasp of astonishment.

"Look! Look, Michael! The painting seems to be moving!"

Old Mr. Galloway remembered that only the gallery light had been on, just as it had been that earlier evening when he had first discovered the painting's third dimension. Apparently the pair in the other room had lighted no other lights when they'd entered.

He could hear them coming closer now, the confused murmur of their excited, unbelieving voices.

There was another gasp from Sylvia. "Why, look, Michael! You can walk right into it! Come on!"

Then she and Michael were stepping through the frame together into the picture. So thrilled were they with their discovery that they didn't even see Old Mr. Galloway there in the shadows at the side of the room.

Instantly the aura of peace was dispelled, and Old Mr. Galloway's anger mounted. She had not left him even this! The picture's greatest charm for him had been destroyed.

Chattering excitedly, Sylvia opened the painted door, peered through curiously. Then she and Michael passed through it into the next room in the painted series.

Old Mr. Galloway moved forward, spryly enough for a man so enfeebled. He was smiling faintly, but with enjoyment, even though all his illusions had crashed. For in one respect, at least, his mind had been set at rest.

He knew now at last just why he had had fashioned a key to the painted door.

YEARS have passed since then, but the painting has never been sold. Old Mr. Galloway still likes the picture. It has a greater charm for him now than ever. He sits there before it, night after night, although he has grown almost incredibly old and feeble by now.

In the very beginning he used to wonder:

Would he ever, in time, unlock that first painted door that he'd closed with such finality behind Sylvia and Michael?

But this is a question that has never been answered, and it's fruitless now to speculate. Sylvia and Michael must have dispelled the picture's charm in more ways than one. For adjust the lights as Old Man Galloway will, the picture's third dimension remains only and obdurately a painted one.

He is not unhappy about this. It is too pleasant to sit there and wonder, to pose other questions. Are Sylvia and Michael still in that second room beyond the locked door, listening, beating soundlessly and futilely upon its panels?

Or have they moved on?

He hopes they have. He likes to think of them wandering together through the second door beyond that, and the door beyond that, going endlessly through room after room, on and on to infinity.

Somehow, it makes his own loneliness seem less poignant.

The Scrawny One

BY ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE old magician had only one arm. "That is why," he explained, "I now employ the fuse. It is dangerous to reach any part of your body inside the pentacle when you light the powder. They are hungry, these ones that we call up, and our flesh is to their taste."

John Harker watched the old man lead the fuse from the powder-heaped center of the pentacle to a safe distance from its rim. He watched him lean over and strike a match on the cement floor, watched the sudden flame disquiet the shadows of the deserted warehouse, watched the fuse begin to sputter.

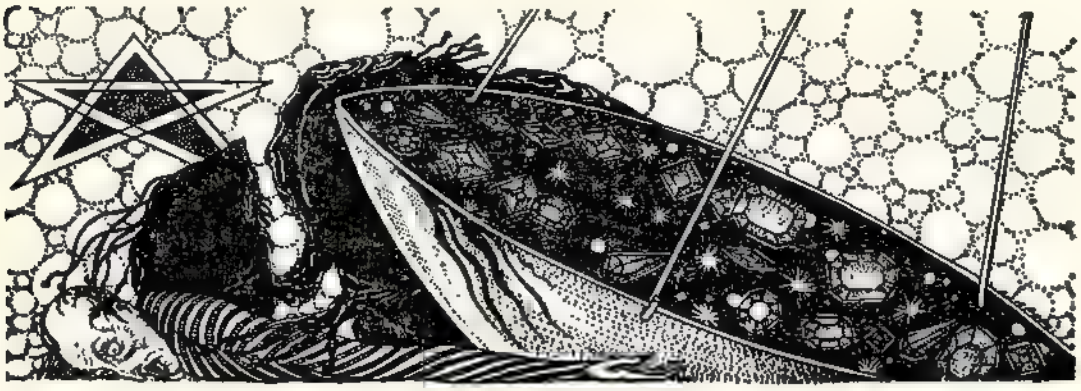
Then John Harker struck. The knife pierced easily through the soft flesh of the old back. His other hand came up to keep the magician from falling across the fuse. He hurled the dying body back, safely away from fuse and pentacle, and thrust it from his mind as his eyes followed the sputtering sparks.

John Harker was unconcerned with fingerprints and clues. After tonight no man could touch him, not even for the most easily proved murder.

He had built to this carefully. Six months of research in the role of a freelance writer, investigating the multitudinous magic cults of Southern California. A meticulous screening of frauds, fakes and phonies, and finally the discovery of this one-armed man of undeniable powers. The arrangements for this instant of ultimate truth, the calling up of a demon. . . .

The hissing boom within the pentacle drowned out the last grating rattle of the

"They are hungry, these Ones that we call up!"



Heading by Vincent Napoli

old man's voice. John Harker looked at what he had caused to be summoned.

The first word that came to him was *scrawny*. Which is a peculiar word to apply to something not of our flesh, nor shaped in any way conceivable to us; but there was that in what passed for its eyes that told of endless deprivation, insufficiency, hunger.

It spoke, though no sound waves disturbed the stillness of the warehouse. It said, "You called me. I can grant you one wish. Make up your mind."

John Harker smiled. "Are your customers usually so irresolute? I have made up my mind."

The scrawny one's eyes fed on him. "What can you want?" it said, and there was hatred and envy in its soundless words. "What can any *man* want when you have the one thing to be prized above all others . . . *flesh?*"

"How fortunate," Harker observed, "that you are not empowered to call us up. But little though you may believe it, we have our hungers too, and largely because of this so enviable flesh. And my own hungers I am resolved to end now."

"Your wish!" The scrawny one writhed in impatience.

HARKER deliberately dawdled, savoring this little moment of power, this curtain-raiser to the ultimate power. "In the opera," he began, "Mephisto, when summoned, proffers Faust first gold, then glory, then power. But that prime idiot the learned Doctor Faust replies, 'I want a treasure that contains them all! . . . I want youth!' " Harker laughed and hummed a snatch of the tripping tune to which Faust expresses his senile desire. "But I know better."

"Your wish!" the scrawny one insisted silently.

"I know that power and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing can all be summed up, in this most worldly of all possible worlds, in one word: wealth. My wish is simple: You will make me the richest man in the world. From that all else will follow."

The scrawny one made a silence of agreement, while darting hunger glimmered in several of its eyes. Then it added, "You must release me from the pentacle before I can accomplish that."

John Harker hesitated. "I know that you are bound to truth while you are contained there. You swear to me that if I release you you will do no harm to me in soul or body?"

"I swear."

"You swear that if I release you you will, immediately, make me the richest man in the world?"

"I swear. You must cut the pentacle with cold steel."

John Harker nodded and jerked the knife from the dead magician's back. As he extended the bloody knife toward the pentacle there was a flicker of the scrawny shape, and that part of the blade which protruded beyond the rim was licked clean of blood.

The cold steel descended and scraped across the cement floor.

The pentacle was empty and the scrawny one was beside John Harker.

"Now!" he commanded.

But the scrawny one flashed the thought that it had something to do first.

When there was no trace left of the magician's body (and how convenient that was, even when you were unconcerned about damaging evidence), the not quite so scrawny one ceased its intricate vibrations and stood all but motionless beside John Harker.

"Are you ready for your wish?" it asked.

John Harker smiled and nodded.

That is, he lowered his chin in assent. A nod is usually concluded by bringing the chin back to its normal position. But his muscles would not obey and his chin remained sunk on his breastbone.

There was trouble with his eyes too. He did not remember closing the lids, but closed they were and obstinately so.

His ears functioned. They brought a sound of music totally unfamiliar to him who had casually prided himself on his knowledge of music. And mingled with the wailing of unknown pipes was the wailing of hundreds of unknown voices. And mingled with the plunking of strings and the thumping of drums was the plunking thump of hundreds of small hard objects, like the rattle of hail close to his ears.

His other senses functioned too. One told

him that he lay suspended on some flat metal surface, that he did not rest in one position but slowly kept floating higher in the air. And another told him that there was not a fiber of his body that did not ache with a pain so exquisitely refined as to be almost beyond the limits of conscious endurance.

And yet another sense informed him that he was surrounded by a stench of decay, an aura of charnel rot so strong, so intimate, that he could not long resist the conclusion that it rose from his own vile body.

The upward movement had stopped, and he floated in equipoise as the music and the rattle ceased and a shout went up from the hundreds of voices. Now at last his eyes half-opened, and he could see his vast bloated bulk swaying in one pan of a tremendous gold balance, while in the other pan hung his weight in precious stones.

The sight of his wealth gave him a last flash of strength. He was able to move his hand close enough to his eyes for their half-parted slits to watch his little finger slowly detach itself and drop, leaving a ragged stump of corruption. Through the eyes that had once been John Harker's, it read the newspaper story:

RICHEST MAN DYING

Annual gem rite held

RAVENPORE, India (UP).—The Djatoon of Khot, reputedly the wealthiest man in the world, lay dying here today of an obscure disease; but his loyal subjects still performed the traditional annual ceremony in which the Djatoon is presented with his weight in precious stones.

The greatest physicians of three continents profess themselves baffled by the degenerative malignancy which has attacked the wealthy potentate, and express no hopes for his recovery.

The once scrawny one used John Harker's features to shape a satisfied smile. Then it used John Harker's muscles to propel his body and went out into the streets of the city, there to accomplish at its leisure those delightful undertakings which would enable it, in time, quite to forget its starved and scrawny past.

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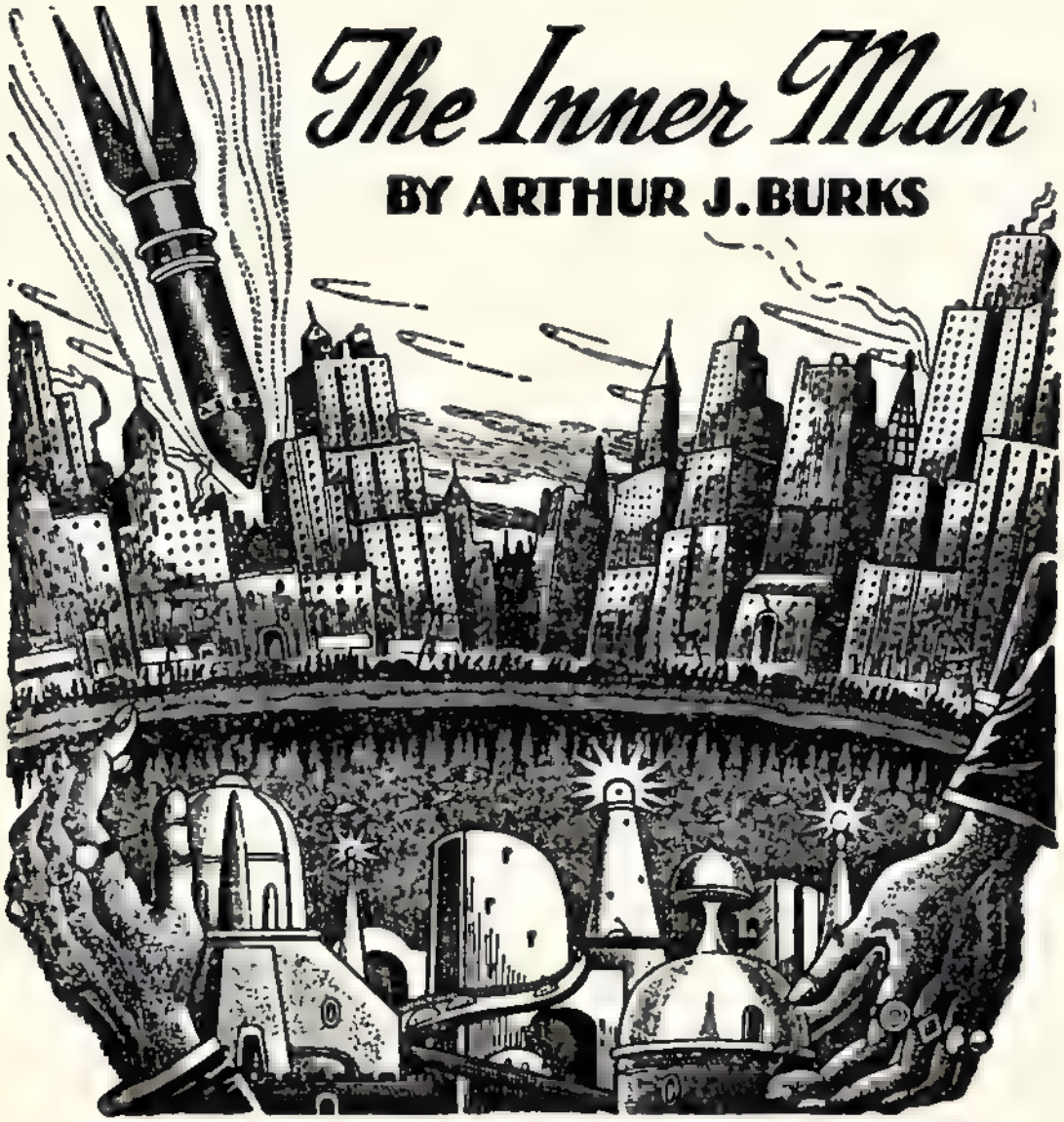
The Inner Man

BY ARTHUR J. BURKS



I WAKENED from a restless sleep and Gars was there. Don't ask me how I knew his name was Gars. I just saw him, and knew his name, as if something spoke to me from him, without sound: "I am Gars!"

I sat up in bed quickly. Automatically I glanced at my watch. It was three o'clock in the morning. Since I lived in a dank mews surrounded by tall buildings, in the City of New York, my room should have been pitch dark, and it was. But I saw the man plainly, in the heart of a soft glow of light. The light was like none I knew. He looked to me steadily and again I caught his thought. I am no clairvoyant yet I knew that what I understood him to think, he thought:

"Take your time. You need to know something of who and what I am. Begin with the name, Gars. It's my name."

There was no doubting that he was a man. I could not hear his respiration, but I

Heading by Matt Fox

The world walks a tightrope on the circling rim of catastrophe

could see the rising and falling of his chest. His eyes were different from any other eyes I had ever seen. They seemed, in some odd way, to coruscate. Not like neon signs, yet it would be foolish to call them little suns. But what else? They were perhaps larger than the average human eyes, golden in their centers. They emitted light; there is no other way to say it. This man could see, then, in the most stygian darkness. He saw me there, in my ebon-dark room. I saw him, not by my light, but by his.

HIS clothing was ordinary. He wore a business suit which looked gray, a white shirt with a black bow tie, a vest with a chain running across the breast, a single-breasted coat, no hat or cap, yellow capped shoes. But he wore them as one unaccustomed to clothing of this kind, as a disguise. Just so might a Mongol wear American clothes, trying to hide among us. The shape of him inside them *appeared* to be human enough, yet when I looked at his head I knew there must be a difference.

His head was bulbous, high-domed forehead, covered with a jungle of *glowing* hair, reminding me of ripe wheat in the sun. The hair, then, was part of his light. His face curved down to a square but truncated chin. There was no hair on his face. I thought again: "super intellectual." I didn't believe that hint came from Gars.

He stood there beside my bed, his hands clasped in front of him. His hands were shapely, his fingers long, slender, physician's fingers. I was struck by his hands not only because of their shapeliness but because he wore so many rings. Until I saw the rings I did not think of him as being a vain man.

"Nor *am* I vain!" he said, in rusty but perfect English, as if he had always known the tongue but had not spoken it for years on end. "It is only today that rings have degenerated into *vanity*. Come, Painter," he went on. My name is Gail Painter, anthropologist and archeologist, "Come, for we must be about our business."

"Who and what are you?" I demanded. I noticed that I could see through him, though I knew he was no spook. I knew also that I could only see through him when he wished me to.

"What I am does not matter yet," he said softly, his voice clear yet sounding as if it came from a far distance. "What you are is most important. You have been chosen as one having understanding, one capable of teaching. I am here to be taught. Others are here, too, surfacing, to be taught—against the day of conjunction."

"Surfacing? Conjunction?" I said stupidly. "You haven't answered my question yet."

"If I told you now who and what I am you would not believe it. You need to see, hear, and realize."

"You're like no human being I know, or spook. If I believed in such nonsense I'd ask you if you are from Mars, Venus, Pluto, Merc . . ."

He chuckled softly, interrupting me.

"I'm not from Outside, Painter," he said. "Quite the contrary. I am an Earthman, like . . . like . . . I was about to say like you, but that is no longer true. Let me put it this way: once, ages ago, you and your kind were like me and my kind."

"Time traveler!" I ejaculated, slipping into my clothes, though he had not bidden me to do anything of the kind.

"In a sense," he said, "yes. But I belong to your era, to 1949, Year of Our Lord. I'm not out of Eden, or any place like that . . . well, exactly like that. Come, Painter, I am not here to mystify you, but to work with you. And there may be very little time."

I was putting on my shoes, having difficulty with the laces in the dark.

"How did you get in here?" I asked. "I locked the door."

"It is still locked," he retorted. "I came in *thus!*"

HE TURNED, paused, held up his right hand as if signaling, stepped through the wall which bordered a hallway of my apartment house, and vanished from sight. I stared at the blank wall through which he had gone. As I stared he walked back through it. Behind him the wall was undisturbed.

"Spook!" I couldn't help saying it.

"No! As human as you are, perhaps more so! Are you ready, Painter?"

"Where are we going?"

"Not far, a few minutes travel—*Russia!*

You have a lease on this apartment which has three years to run, no?"

"Yes," I said, "but how you know, I *don't* know!"

"You'll know shortly." He stepped to the wall where a picture of my mother hung. He raised his right hand. The picture left the wall, went to the bed, lay upon the rumpled coverlets. Gars fixed his attention on the wall behind the picture. He took a ring from his finger. His right hand described speedy angles on the surface of the wall. An opening appeared on it, a recess. He thrust in his hand and a metal dome seemed to grow out of it, like a beehive which fitted comfortably into the recess.

"Central control," said Gars. "I'll explain later, and pray with all your might that you never have to make use of it!"

He stepped back from the wall, his hand moving again, and the surface was covered with a dial face. The ring he had used in this operation was the dial. He turned to me, gave me what felt like a piece of soapstone. It also felt warm in my hand, as if it had a heartbeat, as if it throbbed.

"It's what you call the combination," he explained. "It's in my language, but if you need it you will be able to read it."

I STARED at the "combination." Cuneiform writing? No, flashing light, tiny and deep within the stone, like small thoughts flashing. That the lights spelled out something, over and over, was clear, though I could not read it.

"Just one of the small gadgets," said Gars, "you *modern* people have lost in the mists of time. Call it a super-refined electricity, trapped in the stone! Handling your present day electricity, or rather the method of handling—since electricity, as such, does not change—is like trying to pick up pins with huge pillows on your hands."

I didn't believe any of this, but I was a curious man. I wanted to know more. If it was a dream I didn't in the least mind going through with it.

"I'll unlock the door," I said, when it was clear he wished to go.

"Why?" he said. "Too cumbersome. Besides, we don't go out that way. We go *down!*"

I stared at Gars. He grinned back, appreciating my mystification.

He stooped, swung his left hand in a circle above the floor. The circle he indicated was now visible, perhaps seven feet across. And it had that faint glow about it which distinguished Gars himself.

"Stand in the circle," said Gars. "Hold your breath, if you like. *Your* elevators *crawl!*"

I stood in the circle, my back to Gars. I could feel the warmth emanating from him. He asked me if I was ready. I nodded and the bottom fell out. I've ridden in some fast elevators, but never anything like this. I expected it to fall from under me, and it would have had Gars not put his strange hands on my shoulders. Their pressure was a great weight which held me in place. I saw lights, first, as we went down through floors of the apartment house. The lights were flickers, gone the instant seen, more imagined than real. We were at ground level, but before I could even realize it I knew we were deeper in the earth than mortal man had ever gone before. But there was no discomfort, only great speed. I thought about the hole in my floor, the bottomless pit into which the landlady would fall, or might, when she came to clean up for me.

"There is no hole," said Gars. "Merely displacement and replacement. I am electric, if that will help you to understand. While within my circle you are also within my what-*you*-call 'field', and therefore partake of my attributes! Clear?"

"No!"

"Naturally not. That's why I did not try to explain first. You have so many hidebound ideas to discard, to understand me and my mission. You must revise all your ideas of human history, which has been written, not to inform, but to becloud truth."

It was easy to hear him. The sense of speed went then, and we stopped without shock. A door led away to my right. Gars excused himself, led the way.

"The elevator is all right for short distances. We're seven miles below your apartment. Can you imagine what it would be like to you if you were not with me? This is an area of solid marble!"

"I could not exist! I couldn't be here unless there were a cavern . . ."

"I said *solid* marble! Travertine under unbelievable pressure for unbelievable eons of time. It's possible for us here only because of attributes of electricity. Like electrons we interpenetrate *all!* In actual fact, you coexist with the marble!"

I didn't like the sound of that. I refused to imagine it. It looked to me as if we stood in a bore, a tunnel. We advanced along it to a light. I saw the Core Tompion for the first time. It was a projectile exactly fitting the tube. Inside it was a comfortable room, with chairs, cushions. I stared at these things. They were from my room!

"They'll be back before they are missed!" said Gars. "Sit down!"

UP AHEAD, beyond a partition made of some shiny substance that looked like obsidian but could not have been because I could see through it—by no means a valid reason, as I later learned—I saw the shadowy operator of the Core Tompion. I sat in my own easy chair and Gars stood beside me.

"There is a conference in the Kremlin," he said. "You won't understand it, but listen to me with your thoughts, and you will hear in English—just as you hear me though I don't speak the tongue at all!"

The car started, I felt and heard a rush. Five minutes passed, ten, perhaps twenty. The car stopped. Gars, his face grave, led the way out. We passed through the back wall of the Tompion as we had entered it.

"We enter the conference room at the Kremlin," said Gars, "as I entered your place, and both of us left it!"

"I'm sure Uncle Joe and all the rest will be happy to see us!" I said. There was a touch of the ridiculous in all this which some voice deep inside me discarded. The whole thing was deadly serious. Whatever this man was, and he was something I had never seen before, and if anyone else had the newspapers would have been filled with it, he was on a mission of what he considered great importance, and he was armed with "weapons" of a peculiar efficacy. I thought of his "elevator", for instance, as available to all my countrymen in the event of an A-bomb attack; how quickly and easily they could escape into the earth. And this Core Tompion! Imagine myriads of them converging on the seat of an aggressor government, loaded with trained troops armed with weapons I could just imagine were available, or at least known, to this man Gars!

"They will not be able to see us," said Gars, meaning the Kremlin conspirators. "And what you're thinking! The elevator and Tompion will not be made available to the Surface while a thought of war continues to be held by a human being!"

There was that odd use of the word "surface" again. Of course it was clear that the habitat of this man Gars, and his "pilot", was somewhere inside the earth, all of which he, and they, manipulated to suit themselves. But wasn't this contrary to everything science had learned about the earth? And had any shaft ever been driven as deeply as Gars *said* we dropped below my apartment?

Gars made the lighted circle again, the "field." I stepped into it with him. He asked me if I were ready. I said I was. The "elevator" ascended, halted. I was able to see. It was some moments before I realized that I could not be seen. Gars and I, Gars grim of face—as I must have become when I began to understand!—stared about us at the harsh-faced men around the table. They were discussing a super-atom bomb, which it was clear they possessed! They spoke of attacking Washington, New York, Paris, London, Stockholm, Tokyo.

"They are equipped to do it," said Gars. I was a little surprised that no head lifted about that table as Gars spoke. I realized that the plotters could neither see nor hear him and me.

"I simply shut off radiation!" he explained. "I cancel vibrations which provide vision, hearing, feeling. To them we are invisible, inaudible, as I would be to you if you stepped outside the field."

"Heaven forbid!" I said.

Gars stepped back to a wall where a picture of the Dictator hung. He did not remove this one, as he had removed, then returned, the picture of my mother. He worked through the picture, into the wall, as if neither were an obstruction. He interpenetrated the picture and wall. And as I

watched him at work I listened to the conspirators.

"There is no danger that our bombs will set off a chain reaction, the nitrogen, for instance, and destroy the earth?"

"Nonsense!" said a high-domed-forehead man whom I took to be a scientist. "Old wives' fears! We can shake the earth, as an earthquake does, but there isn't the slightest chance of *destroying* it!"

"Fool!" said Gars. "Ass! what stupidity is sometimes locked in fine brains—especially when the urges of the brain are completely evil! The Dictator has asked a proper question—*and got a wrong answer!*"

I gasped. Then this nation had A-bombs that not only might but *would* set off the nitrogen train! Why, though, didn't Gars simply show himself to these people, declare himself the representative of—what *did* he represent?—interested nations, and make it clear to them that they would destroy not only their enemies but themselves and the world as well?

"Can you just imagine them *listening?*" asked Gars, whose mind-reading I was now becoming accustomed to. I thought it over. Suppose Gars appeared to Uncle Joe as he had appeared to me? Could Uncle Joe tell his advisors about it? Of course he could—if he wanted to be promptly incarcerated. That applied to anybody else's possible "visions" of entities like Gars. No, not only would it accomplish nothing, but it was clear that not any one of the people around the table could, if he wished, halt the course of events. These people, and others, including ourselves in the United States, had unleashed infinite power. Now we could not stop it until it destroyed us, unless . . .

"Come on, Painter," said Gars. "We don't have much time."

WHATEVER Gars had planted behind the Dictator's pictures, nobody suspected. If anyone looked for it he would find the wall as it had been before—solid stone.

We stepped into an open field, far from the Kremlin—I gathered that by the elapsed time, seven minutes—where I could see nothing but a jumbled mass of boulders, apparently in a crater in the heart of a great mountain range. Our field could move laterally as well as vertically.

"It moves in the fourth dimension also," said Gars. "These are the Urals! This," he indicated another one of those aluminum-appearing 'domes' which he set in a recess he made and covered again, in one of the huge rocks, "save that it will set off no chains, is as powerful as Uncle Joe's bomb! It is the exact twin of the one behind the Kremlin picture we just left! Now, London. It isn't far, so we'll travel by Latero-Electrical, *this!*"

"This is like some sort of play performed in nightmare," I said, as we picked up speed and I could see nothing below, or around, perhaps because it blurred completely out. "I'm beginning to want to know more about you, Gars! I've seen enough to believe a lot more than I would have if you had just *told* me. Who and what are you? Why are you here?"

Gars looked at me queerly.

"You believe there was ever such a place as Atlantis?" he snapped.

It gave me a queer, chill feeling, but he wasn't jesting.

"Of course," I said. "Every metaphysician does. It occupied what is roughly now the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Central America, Cuba, Haiti, Porto Rico, Virgin Islands, are all that remain of it above the sea. The last sinking occurred about twelve thousand years ago. Don't tell me you're from *there*, or that you're twelve thousand years old!"

"No, I'm no more from Atlantis than you are. But Atlantis was no myth. You and I were both there in the sense that our ancestors came from there. Now, listen carefully. No matter how great a catastrophe, of all the catastrophes of which you have read, there have always been survivors—even of Pelee and Vesuvius eruptions. Isn't it so?"

"So I've read."

"Can you accept the possibility that some, even of those snatched under the sea when Atlantis sank, managed to survive—especially if they were warned?"

I gulped, swallowed. I sensed that we had slowed down, were over or approaching London, and Gars was stalling to give me the story, as much of it as he felt I should have.

"There was a remnant spared!" he seemed to be musing, as if he personally remembered. "There was no way of escape save *inward*. My ancestors took it, as your ancestors took to lands they could reach ahead of the deluge! We took with us, our ancestors did, science far beyond that to which other escapists have yet attained—because they did not have it when they fled! We have kept and developed, far under the earth's crust, the science we took with us when Atlantis sank."

"And now," I said, believing him now that he had told me something I could not possibly believe, "you're ready to start a war of your own—people from the Earth's Core, against their distant relatives on the Surface!"

"No," he said slowly, carefully. "We are making the greatest bid for peace ever made on this earth. To do it we're fighting your devils with their own fire. Heaven help us all if we fail! After all, can you imagine what disintegration of the earth would mean to *us?*"

While I went silent, striving to comprehend a little of the awesome panorama his words had started to open before my bulging eyes, the "elevator" speeded up.

I came to myself with a start to realize that Gars and I stood side by side, in our "field", in a top-drawer-secret conference room on Downing Street.

CHAPTER II

Complication of Forces

THE Nations of the West were planning to get the jump on the Nations of the East. That was clear at once as Gars and I stood side by side and listened to the words of the planners. It was *so* easy to call these people "planners", the others "conspirators", but actually there was no difference between them. Here, as well as there, the peace of the world, the very *life* and *existence* of the world were threatened. Listen!

"There is no doubt that Moskva has the A-bomb," said a pompous man in uniform covered with plenty of gold. "If there is a question, then grant me that she has the brains to produce it and *will* have it, long before we are in position to fight a long war."

The speaker had the attention of the others.

"We are not in position to fight *any* kind of war," he went on, "but if a war must be fought our only chance is for it to start and end at once. We have neither treasure nor supplies for anything except a super-blitz, simply because we have diverted every piece of money we could filch from the treasury, into war implements!"

"We know all that, Sir Philip," snapped an older man who wore civilian clothes, "so get down to cases! You're the most hideous procrastinator when it comes to coming to the point! You like to hear yourself talk; so do we if you have something to say! So *say* it!"

"We should strike at once from all directions, after lining up every possible ally within, without and bordering on Moskva. We have jet planes, guided missiles, supersonic air-speed planes, cargo planes capable of ferrying entire battalions at once. Let us strike now, with all we have. I have talked quietly with our allies. They are against the move, but they have admitted, through their high brass, that if we actually *make* such a move, they have no choice but to follow on—to make sure that Moskva doesn't do us in and take steps to take over full control."

I stared at Gars. He shrugged. His eyes flashed dull flames that may have expressed anger. His face was still, his forehead smooth. I knew he was deep in thought.

"More discs have been seen during the past two years, all over our outlying dominions, and over England," spoke up another of the score or more of planners. "They can't be tossed off with a joke. Too many reputable people have seen them. We know they're not ours. Our key men in both Americas, where they have been seen, insist they are not theirs. Whose, then, unless they are new, secret weapons of our avowed enemy?"

"How do you know of this?" asked Sir Philip. "Nothing has been mentioned in the newspapers, or I'd have seen it."

"Top military planners for all our allies have kept the papers from saying any more about the discs, lest people become fright-

ened and force us into war prematurely. That's how important they are!"

"What does Moskva say?" asked Sir Philip.

"Just what one would suspect. She sneers, says that our old men are 'seeing visions and dreaming dreams!' Doesn't *deny* ownership of the high-level discs, leaving us to think, and fear, whatever we wish. Moskva misses no propaganda possibility."

I looked at Gars. Our own conveyance, it came to me, if seen at all at the terrific speed she traveled, could well be taken for a "flying disc." Gars shrugged, and I knew the identity, in a general way, of the "discs." I had been traveling in one, which was now my own "field", making me invisible to the "planners" in Downing Street. I could just imagine what consternation would grip these staid Britishers if they knew that even as one of their number spoke of the "flying discs", one of them reposed right in their conference room! It gave me shivers on my own hook. I had myself believed the discs to be an unusual kind of hangover, especially since our top-level military in the States had disclaimed them completely. Now, apparently the whole world was wrong, at least that part of it represented by what Gars had indicated in the word "Surface."

"How many people like Gars are at work?" I wondered.

"Enough," said Gars instantly, "to do the job, provided we haven't waited ever so little too long! If Moskva moved now, or England moved now, we'd be too late, and the end might be sudden and blindingly hideous."

"I can't imagine any of us even *feeling* the end," I said.

"Nothing is ever lost," said Gars, "even *feelings!* Do you think the power of the atom is completely lost simply because it is disintegrated? You're made up of atoms!"

I SCARCELY heard him. I was beginning to realize how the world walked a tightrope on the circling rim of catastrophe. And for all I knew, this man Gars, and his comrades of the other discs, might be more hellish destroyers than any to whom he had taken me to listen. It was certain that he possessed greater potentialities. No one I had harkened to this day could drop feet foremost, in any vehicle owned by man, seven miles straight into the earth—then travel, from that far down, directly to any spot on earth, via the Core Tompion.

Nor did any of them possess the discs. At least every nation in the world known to be friendly to the idea of peace, had denied possessing the discs.

"You said yours was a *peace* offensive," I said to Gars. "Maybe Hitler could, theoretically, have called his *blitzkrieg* a peace offensive. If you are using me as a tool to betray my country's allies . . ."

"What would you do about it?" said Gars, half smiling. "Nothing! You are in no position to do anything until I place the power in your hands, which I came here to do."

"You said you and yours came to be *taught!"* I reminded him.

"People, especially Surface People," he said, "resent being *taught*, but swell with pride when asked to *teach*. I didn't, nor do my colleagues, feel it wrong to let you believe you were being drawn into our plans because of your *unusual* attainments. Every man thinks he has them. Every man thinks if he were elevated to supreme national power he could run the country, even the world, better than it has ever been done . . ."

"One could, at that, especially *now!"* I said grimly.

"You see?" he half smiled at me. "You also, Brutus!"

I felt myself flushing. Even so I knew I had been *selected*. Whatever the reason, I must have *something*. I could see no reason

for humility, to belittle myself just because people, as people and individuals, were vain —proud with a pride too stuffy to endure.

It became clear that war would come any minute. England might not start it, but she would in some way goad the enemy into making a move. She could endure the first hours of aggression which might cost the lives of millions—but her reprisal weapons were so situated that they would not be touched or endangered. The retaliation would be devastating, hideous . . .

"There will be no retaliation," said Gars quietly, "if war starts. There will be nobody left alive to retaliate, and none against *whom* to retaliate. Every man to whom we have listened this morning is not only planning mass murder but mass suicide beyond anything he can possibly imagine—for he plans *our* destruction also!"

"So what do we do?" I asked.

Again the rings on Gars' fingers were busy. In a few seconds he had planted one of those peculiar implements for which I had no explanation whatever, behind the painting of an English King, at Number Ten, Downing Street. From there we traveled to a foggy moor in Central England which must have inspired A. Conan Doyle to write "Hound of the Baskervilles," where Gars performed again the odd ritual—whatever it was—he had performed in the Urals, this very forenoon.

Moskva and England were mined, with a mine of which I hadn't the slightest technical knowledge, though I could see that Gars was relieved that it had been done.

Now he took what appeared to be a smooth metal mirror, perhaps three inches square, from his inner pocket. He spoke against it, after speaking a name—an odd name in each case. I knew that he used some television derivation, for over his shoulder I could see face after face, each one resembling that of Gars himself, somewhat, as Gars called a name, asked for a report. Not only did I see men scattered around the world, but they saw me, out of the "mirror", so plainly that each nodded and smiled at me.

"Ancient television," explained Gars, "long ago discarded as cumbersome, revived just today for a special reason. Do you want me to explain to you what it is?"

I nodded.

"Your television is your greatest current advance in communications," Gars explained, "yet its waves are receptible only a few hundred miles. This seemingly far simpler device is world-girdling, just as is your radio, yet it came into being twenty thousand years ago, and has been part of an Atlantean museum since before the Deluge! Does this statement of fact make you believe in us, ever so little?"

"If I hadn't been at least intrigued," I said, "would I have come with you?"

"Maybe," he said, "it is a question of courage. A tremendous demand is to be made on you and others we have selected. If failure follows, you become, in the eyes, minds and hearts of your people, a super-traitor!"

"I suppose now," I said, letting my breath out slowly, "we visit other national capitols?"

"No. Others work besides Gars, you know. We return now to your apartment, where I constructed the Central Control. There we will suggest what you are next to do. We have less than a week to prevent war!"

We looked in at Downing Street for just a few seconds before returning to New York.

"We are in position to blow up the Kremlin," said Sir Philip, "though it means certain death for our man who will do the job."

"What is one man when millions are to be considered?" asked that old man I was beginning by now to dislike.

"That's almost the same question our demolitions volunteer asked!" said Sir Philip.

I was a little sick as Gars dropped the bottom out again and we went straight into the earth to a great depth once more, to find the Core Tompion awaiting us, far below London. The Core Tompion seemed able to go anywhere, at any time. By a queer twist of memory I thought of a question asked of the Devil in the Biblical Book of Job, and the Devil's answer: *"I've been walking to and fro in the earth, and up and down in it!"* What had the ancient lost writer of those words known that the world had since lost?

CHAPTER III

Command Betrayal

WHEN we were again in my apartment, with my usual things around me, it was only five o'clock in the morning—the *same* morning!—and Gars stood to explain matters to me more fully. I never saw him sit down. Maybe he was never tired.

"I think we are in time," he told me. "Now you deserve the right to know something of events, leading up to this, most of which you'll have to take on trust. That you can do better now that you have witnessed certain things, than if I had simply materialized in this apartment and *told* you. If I had simply *told* you . . ."

"I'd have thought myself suffering from hallucinations," I said, "though I'm none too sure I'm *not*, even as matters stand."

"You are not. This is what has happened to you this morning, with my help."

He told me what I have already recorded here, which might be accepted as some sort of proof until such time as I waked up!

"Before the final sinking of Atlantis," said Gars, "our scientists had developed many items far beyond that in use among Surface People today. They had their Edison, for instance, who lighted the great cities of Atlantis, with lights far superior to your best Mazdas. Globes, containing trapped sunlight . . . you see, you've no inkling of 'trapped sunlight.' It is one of the things toward which your scientists strain; yet it was common right here on earth, twenty thousand years ago. Weather control is another hope of modern science—Atlantis had it in part, but only in part, else the scientists of the day could have averted the sinking of the great land. Now, listen to a few items you'll have to take on faith!"

Gars was staring at my mother's picture on the wall, behind which was what he called the "Central Control."

"Surface People of today," he went on after awhile, "quiver with excitement over planes capable of supersonic speed. Atlantis had planes capable of thirteen thousand miles an hour. We speculate on communication with other planets. Atlantis had such communication. I can't prove any of these things, but perhaps an explanation of these rings will suggest that perhaps the 'impossible' things I tell you later are true. Now *this* one!"

Gars removed the ring which he had used, as I now got it, to construct the "elevator."

"It is atomic power used for personal progress, not to destroy," he said. "It makes use of the connection between electricity and atomic energy. There is no basic difference between energies. This ring is a power unit, a very small one. Here is proof that when your scientists strive to make very small motors, of power units, they but follow a long-ago beaten track. This particular ring is a power unit. With it I construct the 'elevator'—if visionary people see it in earth's atmosphere it becomes a 'disc', which indeed it is!—of force released from the ring-storehouse, but held to it beyond escape. The power unit, when I press the 'stone', thus holds enough power in leash to create the 'field.' We have just ridden on it. Do you understand?"

"Vaguely," I said. "I had some fashion I've been riding a kind of electrical whirlwind!"

"No more so than when you ride an electric train," he said, "except that your electric train is crude, cumbersome, thousands of years behind the times! This ring uses the same electricity without all the obstacles of wood, steel, stone, iron and other metals your scientists feel necessary to make the train go!"

"Go on!" I said, stifling a feeling of irritation with him because he so calmly belittled our scientists.

"Atlanteans were able to travel through the earth, by a process very difficult to explain—though we have just done it!—without using vehicles as you know or imagine them, without using bores, tunnels, channels, anything of the sort. They learned to live in the earth, by *interpenetration!* They got their food from the elements in the earth. They adapted themselves to life below the earth's crust when they knew they must."

I was becoming more and more restive. The man didn't look like a madman, but he sounded like one.

"You have a lie detector," he said, sud-

denly switching his talk. "Atlanteans had a House of Truth, constructed of a kind of rock called—never mind what it was called, it wouldn't mean anything—which had a peculiar *natural* property; no man could be in contact with it and tell lies! In contact with it he must answer every question truly."

I REALIZED that not a statement he had made was susceptible of proof. I was further than ever from being *logically* convinced, though in my heart I believed every word—more *faith* than reason, though based on what I believed to be personal physical experience.

"By using the force contained in my ring motor," went on Gars, "I called certain elements, exactly what I needed of each, together in the niche behind your mother's picture. Oh, I know who she is as well as I knew you before I came to you! We have been forced to make reconnoitering trips ourselves. In the dome you noticed, in your wall—hidden so it might not cause too much questioning by unauthorized persons—is a radio control station. It was done very quickly, yet it is more powerful than any other in New York City. By using it you can make yourself audible on every radio in the world! And by using that radio you can explode . . ."

He bit off his words there as if not yet ready to trust me completely.

"All this," I almost sneered, "from a small finger-ring?"

"Yes," he said calmly, "have you never wondered why, from remotest times, magic has been attributed to the circle? Why is a ring needed to solemnize the most holy thing known to man—engagement and marriage, one for each! Does the value lie in the precious diamond of the engagement ring? In the simple gold of the wedding band? No, racial memory goes back beyond understanding, to when the ring meant . . . what it has meant to you today!"

"You have used but two rings," I pointed out, my voice hoarse in spite of myself. "One ring to form the 'elevator', the Latero-Electrical, the other as the dial of the Central Station. You have more on your hands. What are they for?"

"Let us hope it will never be necessary to use them!" said Gars fervently.

What weird powers reposed in Gars' other rings which caused even Gars to fear them?

"Each one," he said, "is power. Let that be enough for you at the present time."

"Look," I said, "if you have all this power, these discs, this ability to travel under the surface of the earth, why don't you simply send ultimatums to the nations of the world, commanding them to cease planning war? What need have you of people like me?"

"Who would listen?" he answered. "Who, in all the world, believes that there is life at the earth's core, or even seven miles down—except for the unknown life in the ocean 'deeps?' Nobody would listen."

"If nobody listened you *still* have power enough!" I insisted. "You could destroy A-bomb stockpiles. You could cause every motor in the world to go dead—*couldn't you?* You could render every member of the Surface People absolutely helpless, as if hands and feet were forever bound."

"Yes," he said, "yes we could, easily."

"Then why don't you do it?" I almost shouted, so that the sculptor who had the room next to mine banged on the partition with the heel of his shoe.

"It has been generally accepted that people, to a large extent, have free will. So do nations composed of people. If we simply took charge we would be no better than any other nation who considered itself smart enough to take charge. It is no desire of the Core People to make slaves of Surface People. Slavery was one of the curses of ancient Atlantis, maybe one of the reasons she vanished into the sea—who knows what really causes things? Our superiors have decided, only after generations of doubting the wisdom even of that, to use coercion. Mankind progresses through his failures—but he would progress very little if his greatest failure blew the world apart!"

"In effect, then," I said, "what you're here for is self-preservation! If there were no danger to yourselves in a Third World War the world would never have heard of 'flying discs' for instance?"

"Exactly! As long as Surface People

threatened only themselves we had no interest. They could have destroyed one another to the last man and our interest would have been purely academic."

There was still a bug in this somewhere.

"Even so," I said, "you could stop it all, *cold*, with no danger to yourselves, if you chose."

"No," said Gars, "that's no longer true. Some of our scientists slipped up somewhere, or there is a traitor among us. We don't dare risk touching the Moskva A-bombs, for instance, lest we set off the very reaction we fear. So, the makers of the bombs must be induced to do it! They must be shown that there is one thing only for them to do—disassemble the A-bombs!"

I laughed at him.

"I can just imagine them doing it!"

"I hope you can," he said grimly, "for your job will be to try to persuade them!"

I jumped to my feet, rigid.

"In Heaven's Name *how?*"

"I am about to place the power in your hands to enforce obedience. If it doesn't work it's not going to matter to anyone in the world, for there'll *be* no world!"

I gulped, swallowed, sat down again easily, as if sitting on eggs. Gars sat down, if the half standing position he took before my table might be called that, leaned his "televisor" against a pile of books, manipulated a small button on the right hand side of it.

I realized then that he somehow adjusted it, or tuned it in. Pictures began to appear on it, pictures of places, of faces, or rooms, of machinery, of streets, buildings. He could picture on that thin wafer of a gadget any place or person in the world, and hear whatever sounds accompanied the place or person, including whispered speech!

"Thoughts, too, if needed!" he said.

AGAIN I saw the faces, one after the other, of other "Garses", reputedly working in other areas in the world. Gars asked questions of each one, issued instructions. He seemed to be the Field Manager of what might be called a Surface Reconnaissance Party. As he asked questions and I heard the answer, I discovered that each other "Gars", with the help of another "Painter", had duplicated the work of Gars and me.

Thus, every political heart of every nation in the world had been "mined!" Not only that, but within reach of every such national capitol, a "demonstration mine" had been hidden away, exactly as Gars and I had placed "demonstration mines" in the Urals and in the rocks of an English moor. If this were true, and I had no reason to doubt it, Gars, from my room, could wipe every government off the face of the earth *right now!*

"No," he said, "I don't think it will be necessary to go that far! But if it is, which national capitol would you start with—*since you're going to take the necessary steps?*"

His moon-face wore an enigmatic smile.

"Remembering that your own Washington can also be converted into a huge crater in the earth!"

I had nothing to say. What *could* I say that would make sense?

"It's time to start, Painter," he said. He began adjusting that wafer televisor of his. "It is now tuned in on every official radio wavelength in the world! You've heard of a master key to a hotel? This is the master key of wavelengths. Sit here in front of the Atl-screen and speak these words in a normal voice:

" 'World War Three starts without warning at seven a.m. Eastern Standard Time!' It isn't exactly true, since the words themselves constitute a warning. Let's see, the day will be *'Monday, January 31, 1949!'* "

"Okay," I said, "that breaks on every radio in the world that happens to be on. *Then* what?"

"We repeat it every hour," said Gars, "until people take notice of it and begin to jam the radio stations with questions."

"Then I go to the nearest station, tell them my name is Painter and that I'm prepared to save the world! Then they rush me to Bellevue and as far as I'm concerned the war's over!"

Gars smiled.

"You overlook the ingenuity of radio station managers. They will not expect a voice able to appear in all radios, to disclose its origin. They will set a time when they

will *ask* you to tell the world what you're talking about! Remember, every nation in the world will think it emanates from every other nation, certainly *some* other nation, and each nation will be afraid that the announcement is *official!*"

"Suppose, then," I asked, "instead of averting war, I cause the nation planning it to *launch* it?"

"Have you forgotten where we've been this morning?" asked Gars. "And what we did at each place? You are sitting with your fingers practically on the dials of Central Station, remember? Ready? Let's turn on your own radio. Maybe you can hear yourself!"

WHAT could I lose? What harm could I do? Gars adjusted the Atl-screen. I spoke with my lips almost against it, not believing in it much, even now. I never even noticed whether my own radio gave off with my voice.

"World War Three starts without warning at seven a.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday, January 31, 1949."

I turned and looked at Gars. His face was grimmer than I had so far seen it.

"Now," he said, "we wait! Listen to the radio."

The man next door was hammering on the wall again, so I turned the radio down. It was an early morning thing, just as people were rising for breakfast. A "Mr. Grumpy" was sounding sour in a boring monologue. A news commentator droned sleepily. Some music. Time went on. Fifteen minutes passed. Then, a news commentator broke in.

"I am asked to make a curious announcement which is inspired by something nobody seems to understand. Anyone having an explanation, please telephone it to the station to which you are listening. It seems that this parent station has received over a thousand telegrams, in the last twenty minutes, asking about a mysterious voice, speaking the following words.

"Wait, now, I'll read them:

" 'World War Three starts without warning at seven a.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday, January 31, 1949!' That is all! Our broadcast continues!"

CHAPTER IV

Ultimatum

"NOW," I said, sitting back, "every radio station in the world will be checked, during the next hour, to make sure some practical joker isn't loose in one of them. Ham stations will be checked, too. Then, authorities begin looking for an illegal broadcasting station. Then I get carted off to the sneezer!"

"Suppose authorities come here," said Gars, comfortably. "I become invisible, even to you. They find—what do they find here, my friend?"

It *did* seem silly. Even if they found the the Atl-screen they'd think it to be what it looked like, a trench-mirror.

"Besides," Gars continued, "this happens to be a broadcasting station that can't be traced to a source—except by *my* people, who already know it. Your voice came from everywhere, and nowhere!"

Half an hour later I got back on the Atl-screen and spoke exactly the same words, though already they had the world by the throat. I knew that by the excited bulletins which kept coming over my radio:

"This station has now received five thousand telegrams, from all parts of the country east of the Mississippi, asking about the phantom voice of war!"

"Our member stations report telegrams and telephone calls too numerous to handle!"

"London astounded by the voice of war! England asks this question: *'Does this warning originate with our enemies?'* "

"Moskva expresses irritation with juvenile propaganda of Anglo-American 'War Voice' stunt! Later: Moskva admits local people hear 'War Voice!' If this is so, how can it come *from outside the Iron Curtain?*"

"Radio authorities of the United States checking for unauthorized broadcasting station."

"Argentine accuses America of setting up a 'black market' broadcasting station as a war scare measure! Search is being made for the 'War Voice!' "

One hour after the first broadcast every

nation in the world had reported having heard it. Each nation also expressed official mystification and assured all other nations that it was seeking an explanation and that the guilty broadcaster would be exposed if within their borders.

The mystification deepened. I doubt if anyone can imagine my feelings at this time. I had never spoken over the radio, not once. Now, I had addressed milliions of people, projected myself into the "cold war" which gripped the entire world.

"Authorities confess themselves completely unable to state in which country, or in which part of the world, the 'War Voice' originates! It spoke English, but English is spoken . . . just a moment, it has been heard again, speaking exactly the same words!"

"It is clear, friend Painter," said Gars, "that you have the world by the ears. It's much more responsibility than merely having a bear by the tail!"

"I don't like it!" I said.

"Nor does anyone else, especially world governments!" retorted Gars. He seemed pleased with himself. "I'd like to wager that you get a 'proposition' within two hours!"

HE missed it by fifteen minutes! One hour and forty-five minutes later these words came over my radio:

"No slightest hint has been received of the identity of the 'War Voice' or what it can mean. Radio has no explanation of how the speaker was able to be heard on countless radios, of most of the stations in the world, indicating something in radio unknown to topnotch technicians. It's more puzzling than the 'closed circuit.' This station, then, has initiated a suggestion. The 'War Voice' does not need an international hook-up, we realize, but we have arranged with the principal stations of the world to listen at 10:45 this morning. If the 'War Voice' wishes to elaborate then on its original statement, let it know that it has the breathless interest of the entire world. Ten-forty-five this morning!"

I looked at my watch. Two hours to go.

There seemed to be no need of repeating that first broadcast which had struck the world with such a cumulative impact. It had been noticed only because it had, literally, been heard "round the world."

At 10:45 I broadcast the words suggested by Gars:

"This is a supreme effort for peace," I said. "Nations now planning war do not realize that the next war means not only the end of civilization, but the end of the world. Therefore, *war must not come!* Officials will not listen to reason, so a suggestion of force will be indicated in exactly fifteen minutes from now. *It will affect every nation in the world.* Wherever you are, you will hear or feel an explosion, for it will be brought about within hearing distance of every seat of government—*at eleven o'clock, Eastern Standard Time!*"

Gars had my mother's picture back on the bed, the dial-face opened, his fingers on the dome inside.

"It's now set to let off every explosion required." he said. "We're merely doing around the world what an ordinary man with a plunger does on a simple road-building job. We should be able to hear, or at least feel, the eastern seaboard explosion."

"Is anyone likely to be killed?" I asked. "Did all your friends pick spots like the Urals and that English moor?"

"If they didn't," said Gars, "far fewer people will stumble into the isolated danger areas than would be killed in the first hour of an aggressive war. Stand by! You press this small button—or would you rather *I* did it?"

I wanted to do it myself, I might as well confess it. I was drunk with a sense of power which made me understand other power-driven ones, ever so little.

Ten seconds before eleven o'clock. The radio was going crazy as men tried to dramatize the amazement of the world.

Then, silence, at five seconds before eleven. I stood at the wall, hand on the button, eyes on my watch.

At exactly eleven o'clock I pressed it.

I didn't hear anything, but I felt a tremor, as if a subway train beneath me were passing a little faster than usual, or halting too suddenly.

"Eastern seaboard explosion!" said Gars

calmly. "Now, let's see what the radio has to say!"

It was plenty. Not a blast, anywhere in the world, had failed to explode. If there had been any casualties they had not yet been reported.

I went back on the air without anyone making any arrangement, knowing my first words would have the interest of the world.

"Every government seat," I said, " is mined exactly as were the isolated spots we have used for demonstration. The 'War Voice', as you have named me, is not only able to destroy every government body in the world, *instantly*, but is equally able to destroy government officials one by one. There is an alternative. Within seventy-two hours every government must send a plenipotentiary, with extraordinary powers, to a central city they shall agree upon. There they shall sit in conference until they have agreed upon treaties, which *must* include general disarmament and international control of fissionable materials! Remember, in seventy-two hours! Let me warn you that it is quite impossible to find the explosive elements with which, I regret to say, we find it necessary to threaten the governments of the world! But dare you risk the possibility that they do not exist? I trust I shall never again interrupt your radio programs!"

The rest is history. Government heads got together within the seventy-two hours. There was considerable aftermath, among which was this: I can't even remember how many different people said something like this to me in restaurants, in bars, on subways:

"Wonder who the 'War Voice' was, anyhow? Some nut, you can bet on that!"

If a man who brought peace to the world, or tried to, were generally regarded as a "nut" I could expect to see Gars again in my own lifetime.

But when I turned away after that broadcast "ultimatum" he had vanished. *So* far I have not seen him again.

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Phoebe

BY MALCOLM KENNETH MURCHIE

THE setting was perfect. There was a moon out somewhere back of the August sky and a country club orchestra in the distance playing up to the limited abilities of its six pieces.

"I love you, Phoebe," Leland whispered as they sat on rush-backed benches under the night. "You're the loveliest girl in all the world. I don't know how anyone can be so lovely!"

Her laughter was a little pleased, a little spoiled.

Then Leland added with a touch of petulance, "Why you have to go up to that Lodge is more than I can understand!"

"Silly!" Phoebe answered, touching his

The only clue was a dim memory lost somewhere in the currents of time

Heading by FRED HUMISTON

mouth with long, tapering fingertips. "It's only for a few days!"

On the way up to the Lodge in the mountains Phoebe Andrews did some thinking, as much thinking as was compatible with one of her type. Motoring helped her think —she did the driving because her father's eyesight wasn't so good, while he'd sit in the back and occasionally tell anecdotes she'd heard before or reminisce about his wife, her mother, who'd been dead for more years than you can remember somebody well through.

In the vernacular, and by the standards that are standard, her father was a good father. He had been more than moderately successful in his business, had sent his daughter to the best schools and given her the best opportunities.

Phoebe was an "only"; she sensed casually and with no interest that there was some mystery surrounding those early, dim days where, as a child develops out of the vacuum of consciousless infancy, it first begins to be aware. But this mystery was something that never piqued her curiosity much. If her mother had lived, she might have asked. Somewhere tucked away back of her twenty-one years was the impression of another one. Perhaps another birth, another child. It had died, or something too grim like that! Phoebe never knew, never cared particularly, aand certainly her father never said anything.

HER thoughts were mainly on Leland. He was currently at the top of her sweepstakes. He had several outstanding plus signs after his name. There were a good many young men with money after Phoebe. There were a great many with good looks after her and a sizable number whose company she enjoyed. To tolerate a man, to enjoy him would be the limit of Phoebe's love for anyone outside of herself. It was for her to choose, on the other hand, who she would allow to worship her, and that permission should, of itself, more than repay any amount of abject male devotion. She had basked in this kind of attention ever since, as a fourteen-year-old just divorced from her pigtails, she went to her first dance.

"Do you like him, Dad?" she broke into a long silence as the car's tires swished on the hot tar road that wound into the mountains.

"Who?" Her father, semi-drowsing in the back seat, came awake with the discipline of one who, even though its parent, was considerably in awe of this beautiful girl-child.

"Leland, of course! Silly! You were sleeping!"

"He seems all right," her father admitted grudgingly. What he thought, he knew, would mean little. Phoebe would do what she wanted and marry whoever she wanted, and, after all, his only concern was that she be happy.

The Lodge was as usual, even to Judge Scanlon and Colonel Rossiter, those perennial guests who greeted her father with enthusiasm on the portico to renew some multi-versioned account of a fishing or hunting trip taken long ago.

Phoebe drifted off into the younger strata with a smile that was as cool and condescending as her white crepe dress. There were a few of the old familiar faces, and the men belonging to them came to her quickly, almost fervently. Phoebe bestowed each with a special smile.

For the girls she had a certain set-apart sympathy which, in no way, interfered with her own techniques but which occasionally caused her to view them with some compassion through the green, obliqueness of what Leland (cute boy!) had once called her "soulless" eyes.

All her life Phoebe had noticed the other girls, watched them and felt superior to them with a secret inner smile. And she was superior. The turbulence that she had caused at the resort right now was another proof of something that needed no proving.

Yes, the Lodge was the same as usual. But there was, Phoebe came to notice, one difference. The difference was Phyllis Kent. Phoebe got the name from one of the resort desk clerks, and the fact that she did was a mute testimony to the other girl.

Se she knew her name even before formal introductions one day on the tennis court. Phyllis was like those others in many ways. She had arrived alone. Nobody seemed

to know anything about her. There are hundreds of thousands of girls like that who go hopefully to resorts every year, save for it, dress for it, and seek their fortunes (men) for two or three weeks or a month.

Phyllis was different in one way. She *had* it. If nobody ever left Phoebe's side to cross over to where Phyllis was holding court, it was likewise true the other way around, and a completely new experience for Phoebe. Objectively, she noticed that the Kent girl had long, naturally blonde hair, a come-hither face and a well-built figure that caught men's eyes at the pool or on the dance floor.

ALL these were qualities Phoebe possessed, but there are lots of pretty girls in the world, girls with blonde hair, pretty faces, and figures to go with them. Above and beyond all this, Phoebe Andrews had had something else, the indefinable something that holds men once they have been attracted by the facade of beauty.

Phyllis also had this. She danced exquisitely. She swam well and played tennis effectively. There was growing in Phoebe a slight resentment toward this other girl, as though if in the world there were a million men for each, it would not be enough unless she, Phoebe, had them all.

It was in the measure of a challenge, she realized, but unspoken, undeclared, for the two were on the most casual of terms, a cryptic smile here or a nod or some little casual remark. As the Kent girl's prowess was increasingly evidenced, Phoebe made a concession to her own growing resentment and perturbation over the situation by inquiring from the Assistant Manager, a veteran and plain little man of the hotel trade to whom inquiries from the lovely and glamorous Phoebe Andrews, "who has money as well as all that beauty!" were as nectar from the gods.

Phoebe had been hoping that the Kent girl perhaps would have to rush back any moment now to some grubby little job. It couldn't be too grubby, of course, or she would not have been able to come to the Lodge, which certainly was not inexpensive.

The Assistant Manager, fumbling the leaves of resort ledgers and records and dropping his silver-shanked pencil with nervous fingers, delivered the information that the Lodge knew nothing whatsoever about Miss Phyllis Kent, but that she came from Chicago.

Along with a few million other people, Phoebe smiled wryly.

No, she had never been to the Lodge previously, had arrived alone, paid for two weeks in advance, and had known no one until—getting acquainted.

She seems to be doing quite well for her self, the Assistant Manager offered and then could have cut his throat with the knowledge that he had said the wrong thing.

Phoebe and her frosty look left the business office. She was intensely annoyed at being annoyed. As she walked toward the portico, she caught a glimpse of the red-clay tennis court through the trees. Phyllis Kent was playing with a man who only a few nights ago had been whispering endearments in Phoebe's ear. Her resentment grew.

Part of it gave way to insecurity and doubt when she got the telegram. It was from Leland and said with much "darlings" and "love you's" that he was going to try, try his very hardest to get up there the following weekend. Phoebe put the wire back in its yellow envelope. At any other time, under any other circumstances, she would have welcomed this. But now the last thing she wanted was Leland arriving there at the Lodge, and the knowledge of why she feared this made her hatred for Phyllis Kent grow apace.

THAT evening she was irritable with her father, which was out of character, for it did not fit the concept of the crowned and reigning queen behaving in the grand manner. But Phoebe definitely felt the wand being wrested from her hand. It was most frightening.

The scheme came to her the next day. It was, in many ways, imperfect, born of the exigencies of the moment, unsure. But it was *something* at a time when action was demanded.

There was across the range of mountains that stretched north of them an artistic and

bohemian center boasting a summer theatre. This town at the state's northern tip, merely a day's drive away, was one which Phoebe, herself, without her father's knowledge had visited a couple of years ago. It was replete with its uninhibited, unconventional hordes of third-rate actors, would-be actors and hangers-on. She had found the chorus-boy types only passingly amusing, with their profiles and their thoughts of Big Things to come. They were all, or virtually all, penniless.

Neville, the name of the town which housed this summer concoction, would never rival the Lodge as a rendezvous for settled, steady good catches of the highest type. But there was an idea here to be worked on.

Phoebe started it off by getting to know Phyllis Kent better. Then she said with studied guile:

"You know, darling, you'd be simply too perfect for some of these summer theatres! They're always looking for people . . . oh, are you interested in that kind of work? Well, why don't we, just the two of us, drive up to Neville for a day or so. I think it would be lots of fun!"

It was as easy as that. The Kent girl bit, and Phoebe was savagely satisfied. Another adjutant to her plans was a surreptitious visit to the Kent girl's room while Phyllis was at the pool. The modest roll of bills in the white linen handbag and the absence of any checkbook was all Phoebe needed to know. The annoyance at finding a lipstick that was the same brand she herself used was lessened by the prospect of her scheme.

They would drive over the following morning, and Phoebe, after making proper preparations, would see to it that the other girl was dropped in Neville sans any money. The thought of filching the Kent girl's funds from her purse at an opportune time never struck Phoebe as dishonest. It was merely an expedient made necessary. Then she, herself, would be back in time for the week-end and to meet Leland.

Phyllis would not be able to get back. There was no transportation but private car and she would never be able to wire for funds and hire one before Phoebe and Leland had had their tryst and left the Lodge once and for all.

Phoebe had already ascertained that Phyllis' belongings were under one-bag capacity. She had persuaded the Kent girl to bring everything with her.

"That's one thing about these one-horse theatrical productions. You don't know what sort of part they'll want you to play—oh, I know they'll like you — and they never, never have anything to fit you!"

THE one bag accompanied them as they drove off from the Lodge and wound into the mountains north of it. Phoebe had told her father that she was making the trip to Neville overnight with "this girl friend."

She had also done something else. She had let it be known generously around the resort, but behind Phyllis' back, just before they left that the Kent girl was probably not coming back.

The Andrews sedan purred north with Phoebe behind the wheel, the two girls sitting in the front seat and the bags in the back. Away from the noise and commotion and systematized activities of the Lodge, there seemed little to say. As an hour and more passed, Phoebe found herself struggling with a sense of guilty discomfort. They drove on and she had time for her thoughts on the deserted road that curved through the peaks and gorges of the range.

Her spells of feeling sorry for Phyllis were no more than fleeting ones; she would think again of the men who'd been hers, going up, instead, to Phyllis at the pool's edge or accompanying Phyllis on the bridle path.

The steward at the Lodge had fixed up a hamper of food, and in the middle of the day, they pulled off the road. Phoebe lit a cigarette and flicked on the car radio.

"Might as well eat."

The other girl nodded, and Phoebe marveled at her composure. Was it strange that she asked no more questions than she had, which actually had been none, since their talk the other day about the summer theatre? In Phyllis' place, she, Phoebe, would be most curious.

The sun was just beyond its zenith, and Phoebe calculated that they were halfway to their destination. Three hours more or so

of driving and they would be at the outskirts of Neville. A thought occurred to her. She'd been around cars long enough and taken a motor course during the war so that in a pinch she could change aa tire.

"Do you drive, Phyllis?"

"Oh, yes," the other girl replied.

She does everything, Phoebe thought to herself. Everything! And they love her for it! Leland used to say, "Phoebe, along with a million other reasons, I love you because you *do* everything! And well! I've never known another girl like that."

She had preened herself on his praise, and here was this . . . this creature!

She stretched and reached into the back of the car for the hamper. As she pulled it over the seat top between them, Phyllis turned to help her and she looked squarely into the other girl's face. It was a pretty face. A beautiful face. But more than that, she was shocked with that something she'd noticed the first time. When she looked at Phyllis, it was like looking into a mirror, for the other girl was her image, and this had been attested to at the Lodge to a ludicrous degree, like the time Father and his bad eyesight, had come up to Phyllis in the dining room, planted a kiss on her cheek and said, "Dear, I'm sorry I'm late. I've been playing croquet with the Colonel."

In a sense, there might have been the essence of flattery here, for after all, it took a girl formed and built in her image to do so well, but perversely, that bothered Phoebe the most. It was an imposition. It was wrong. Wrong! No one should be as *she* was! This girl was a copy-cat! And what was most unforgiveable of al!. she was a menace to Phoebe!

THE sandwiches had ham and lettuce and mayonnaise in them. Others were egg and then there were jelly ones. There was a thermos of iced coffee. The two girls ate and talked, or at least Phoebe did most of the talking.

"Where do you come from, Phyllis?" she asked her companion.

"Chicago."

"Good old Chicago! I was born there."

"I know."

The remark was peculiar, and Phoebe with a guilty conscience, wondered if Phyllis had been making inquiries about *her*.

"Tell me, what do you do. . . . I mean when you're not vacationing at the Lodge." She tried to make it sound casual.

"Well," the other girl replied and looked down at the end of the sandwich she'd been eating, "right now you're about to get me started on an acting career!"

Phoebe's laugh was forced.

"What about you?" the Kent girl asked.

What about you! What a silly question, Phoebe thought to herself. This girl certainly isn't easy to get along with! She can't suspect anything's funny, though. How could she?

Phoebe busied herself with dabbing at crumbs on the rubber floor pad of the car. She set the hamper on the back seat.

"Well, shall we shove along?"

"Where are we?"

"Oh, just about halfway."

"Pretty up here, isn't it? I like motoring where there isn't any traffic."

"Coming back you can drive a bit if you want."

"Yes," said Phyllis, and Phoebe felt the other girl regarding her; then, "You told them at the Lodge I wasn't coming back."

It was a statement, not a question, and Phoebe took the shock of it on her conscience. There was an uncomfortable feeling up and down her spine. Damn it! Phyllis had gotten wind of that! She turned towards the other girl, her face open and guileless in the Phoebe manner:

"Darling, we both may just ravish them over in Neville! Perhaps the audiences won't let us go back!"

Phyllis eyed her levelly, and Phoebe had again that disconcerting feeling of looking into a mirror. She turned her head away as though with that the image would go, stepped on the ignition and pushed the starter irritably.

They drove on through the lonely, mountainous country, the sun at their left moving into the west.

This might make things more difficult. Phyllis might not fully trust her, might not give her any more chances to rifle the white linen handbag. Even now Phyllis was holding it tightly on her lap. Still, at the least,

ditching the girl at Neville, hurrying back even if she made the trip by night, would give her a chance with Leland before the other could possibly return to the Lodge, even if the distractions at the summer theatre were not enough to keep her away.

THEY were alone along the mountain tops with white, cotton puffs of clouds moving lazily through the blue sky above them when Phyllis spoke.

"Let's stop again, Phoebe. I want to stretch my legs."

Phoebe pulled up at the side of the road, careful not to come too close to the precipitous edge that dropped away into the valley.

Phyllis opened the door on her side but didn't get out. She stuck her legs out and wiggled them.

"Gets cramped," she sighed.

They were pretty legs, as pretty as Phoebe's own. Everything about Phyllis was. That was the disgusting part of it!

There was silence between the two for a while.

"You don't like me." Again it was a statement and not a question, and this time a denial started from Phoebe's lips.

"Why Phyllis! What a thing. . . ."

"I know." The Kent girl smiled. "I know everything about you, Phoebe."

The distance from where they were going back to the Lodge or forward to Neville seemed suddenly insufferably long to Phoebe. This girl was strange, very strange.

"You say the *funniest* things, Phyllis!"

"And *I* knew you were going to say that." The Kent girl went on, "Didn't you wonder, Phoebe, when you saw me? Is your mind so small with little concerns, *your* trivial affairs, *your* life's procession of man-catching and intriguing that you never think about big things?"

"I don't know what you're saying, what you're talking about, Phyllis! What's the matter with you?"

"You're jealous of me. You hate me."

Phoebe shook her head. "*I* jealous of *you!* Why, Phyllis? You're talking crazily!"

"In a way . . ." the other girl continued, ". . . it's okay. It's fair enough. I'm jealous of you, Phoebe. I always have been. For twenty-one years. Yes, I'm twenty-one, too. But *you* never had to worry about me until this week. I've always known about you!"

The girl was peculiar! That much Phoebe knew with a sudden startling clarity. She lit a cigarette to keep her hands busy. Oh God, she wished she were in Neville now where she could get rid of this creature! Some blithering, underprivileged idiot who'd heard her father had a few dollars and that she, Phoebe, was going to marry even more!

"Look, if this summer theatre idea seems kind of silly to you, let's let it go and turn back."

"*We're* not going to turn back, Phoebe, but *I* am!" Phyllis's red lips came back over perfect, even teeth.

PHOEBE felt the thing at the pit of her stomach that must be fear. It was an unusual emotion for her as was the situation. How to cope with it was beyond her. This girl was obviously insane!

"Yes, my love, you've had me to worry about for a few days but I've had you for all these years! The things you've done and the places you've gone. The men who've loved you. All this belonged to me as much as you, Phoebe, and maybe more! But *you* had it! And I had nothingness!"

Phoebe found her voice. It was a croaking thing and it said hoarsely, "Let's get going again, Phyllis. We're miles from anywhere." And she reached for the ignition.

But Phyllis's strong fingers stayed her. "Not yet, dear! It's all right! I want to *talk to* you some more!"

"But what . . . what in the world is there for us to talk about?" Phoebe heard her own voice pitched too high. Here now, she must quiet herself down. It was no good showing this other girl she was puzzled and frightened. A girl who scored this kind of victory over her.

"Look . . . I don't know what the gripe is, but this is all awfully silly! A person means something as kind of a . . . kind of a *joke*, and somebody else gets all worked up about it! Let's call the Neville trip off. We can get back to the Lodge before dark."

"But what about Leland, dear Phoebe? You don't want *me* to see him!"

Phoebe turned her face away and looked out the car window at the blue sky. There

was no answer there. She bit her lip. Lord, this was queer. It was weird! How did *she* know about Leland? Was this one of those people like on the radio, oh, they're always being exposed as fakes, who pretend to read minds? Some say it can't be done. Some say it's chicanery.

Phoebe took a tight hold on herself. She turned quietly, summoning her last bit of control. Her cigarette was out and she lit another one quickly

"What's it all about, Phyllis? What do you want?"

The other girl smiled back at her. There was no particular hostility now. Only meaningful purpose.

"Your life, Phoebe!" she breathed. "You've had it up to now and now I want it! You don't remember me, do you? Of course you wouldn't! You were—what is it they say?—*too young!* But I had as much right as you, Phoebe. Instead, *you* were the choice over *me!*"

This mad, mad creature meant every word she was saying! Phoebe began to cry inwardly with fear and helplessness and not knowing what to do.

Then she saw Phyllis open the white linen bag and take the knife out, and terror at the sight of it froze up her tears.

"I'm going to kill you, Phoebe. You had no right to those twenty-one years! You have no right to any more, to go beyond this day, this hour!"

THE Andrews sedan was the same, the same prosaic steering-wheel she'd fondled so many times on so many roads. The speedometer with the red light that lit up if you went over fifty, and outside, the sameness of the scenery and the sky that was all things, all places. And in all the world and her history, there was no moment that mattered but now.

Her legs were cut off above the knee with weakness so she could not make the moves that would cause her to jerk open the door and run down those desolate mountain paths. It would be useless, she strangely knew. Phyllis Kent would be on her.

Phyllis Kent? Was that her name? Of course not! When she said, "Who are you?" the other girl just smiled.

The knife was smallish, but it caught a piece of the sky as Phyllis turned it in her hand and reflected a dab of brightness against the roofing of the car. Phoebe found she still held the cigarette and took a quick, nervous puff at it. She had often prided herself on the thought that she could handle men in any situation. But a girl, a deranged monster like this, was quite beyond her experience, and with that knowledge, came a sharp resignation.

When Phyllis moved towards her suddenly, instinct made her struggle. She extended what had become a pathetically weak right hand holding the cigarette and had a glimmer of satisfaction as she saw its red tip burn into the flesh under the Kent girl's ear, just before the sweet, terrible pain in her ribs as the knife thrust home caused her senses to reel and the cigarette to fall from nerveless fingers. The other girl was on her now, her face close to hers, but the twisting of the knife in her side was something remote.

"Do you know who I am now?" she could hear Phyllis saying over and over as her own green eyes looked into the green eyes of her assailant. Her face to Phyllis', her body against Phyllis', the two exact images of the other.

Do you know who I am now?

The pain beneath her ribs and inside of her was some far-away thing, and as she lay there half out of the car—for Phyllis had opened the door and lifted her body so that the redness would flow onto the ground—she was still pinioned by the spike thing in her side and the weight of the other girl on her.

Beyond the triumphant face so close to her own, there was the great canopy of the sky, and her spirit soared towards it, being for a hair-breadth's moment of two worlds; with the flow of her life out onto the rocky cliff shoulder, she floated backward, it seemed, to that other, the flow of birth eagerly, painful and poignant at once, with both life and death.

There was in her a sudden, flashing memory of the primitive victory she had won, her cells and being over that other . . . that other which had been dispatched back into the limbo of things unborn or dead.

And as Phoebe hesitated on the edge of nothingness, she looked into the green eyes so close to hers, still hearing the voice, its hot breath on her face.

"Do you know who I am now?"

It was that awful truth that she knew now at last, but for an instant only.

THE Lodge was a busy Lodge. People played tennis and swam and danced, and Father Andrews sat on the portico with Colonel Rositer and Judge Scanlon and talked about fishing trips and hunting trips as the men tried to out-lie each other.

The males of the Lodge had wondered with reminiscent gleams in their eyes where that "lovely creature," Phyllis Kent had gone. But then, menlike, they had found other things for their attention. Like the ebullient Phoebe, for instance. But her time, this weekend, was very much taken up with Leland.

She thought she knew her mind now. She would let him—oh, he'd have to work hard for it—argue her into saying "Yes" finally.

They stood under the stars by the lake and looked up at the mountain range northward. It was black, ghostly in the moonlight, and Leland put his arms around her. He kissed her. And he said, "I love you, Phoebe. You're the loveliest girl in all the world. I don't know how anyone can be so lovely!"

Leland leaned forward to kiss her again ardently.

"Darling!" he expostulated suddenly, paying mock attention to the thing he'd discovered, "you can't even be away from me for a few days without . . . did one of the jealous girls fire an arrow at you?"

Her laughter tinkled pleasedly as she felt instinctively for the small, red mark under her ear.

"Silly!" she said. "It's only a birthmark!"

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The Antimacassar

BY GREYE LA SPINA

"SHE didn't last very long," said Mrs. Renner's resentful voice.

Lucy Butterfield turned her head on the pillow so that she might hear better the whisperings outside her bedroom door. She was not loath to eavesdrop in that house of secret happenings, if by listening she might find some clue to Cora Kent's mysterious disappearance.

"Because she was not a well woman, missus. It was just too much for her. You should've knowed it, if Kathy didn't."

That, Lucy knew, was the voice of Aaron Gross, the ancient pauper whom her landlady explained she had taken from the county poor-farm to do her outdoor chores. It was a high, cackling voice quite in character with the dried-up little man to whom it belonged.

"Sh-sh-sh! Want to wake her up?"

Lucy sat upright in bed, by now keenly attuned to those low voices in the corridor outside her room. The knowledge that she was not supposed to hear what her landlady and the hired man were discussing lent a certain allure—half mischievous, half serious—to her almost involuntary eavesdropping.

"Kathy had to be fed," said Mrs. Renner's sharp whisper. "Listen at her now! How'm I going to put her off? Tell me that!"

Lucy, too, listened. From one of the locked rooms along the corridor she heard a soft moaning and knew that what she had been hearing for several nights was not a dream. Twelve-year-old Kathy Renner, confined to her bed with rheumatic fever and denied the solace of sympathetic company for fear the excitement might bring on a heart attack, was wailing softly.

"Mom! I'm hungry! Mom! I'm hungry!"

A house of secret happenings, a night of creeping horror.

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

Why, the poor kid! Lying there alone all day with no one to talk to, and crying all night with hunger. Lucy's gorge rose against the hard efficiency of Mrs. Renner. How could a mother bear hearing that pitiful pleading? As if some relentless intuition pushed her into explanation, Mrs. Renner's voice came huskily.

"Listen at her! Oh, my little Kathy! I just can't bear it. I can't get at them tonight but tomorrow I'm going to take out that honeysuckle!"

Lucy's gray eyes roved across the room to rest with puzzlement upon a tall vase of yellow-blossomed honeysuckle dimly seen in the half light on one shelf of the old bureau between the two south windows. She had thought it pleasant that her landlady brought them in fresh daily, for their high perfume was sweet and they seemed part of the country life to which she had given herself for a two-week vacation from her new and responsible buyer's position in the linen department of Munger Brothers in Philadelphia.

"Don't do it, missus. You'll just be sorry if you do. Don't do it!" Sharp protest in old Aaron's querulous voice. "You know what happened with that other gal. You can't keep that up, missus. If this one goes, it won't be like the first one and then you'll have double trouble, missus, mark my words. Don't do it! Accidents are one thing; on purpose is another. Let me get a sharp stake, missus—?"

"Hush! Get back to bed, Aaron. Leave this to me. After all, I'm Kathy's mother. You're not going to stop me. I'm not going to let her go hungry. Get back to bed, I tell you."

"Well, her door's locked and there's honeysuckle inside. You can't do anything tonight," grudgingly acceded Aaron.

Footsteps receded softly down the corridor. The old Pennsylvania Dutch farmhouse out in the Haycock sank into silence, save only for that plaintive moaning from the child's room.

"Mom! I'm hungry! Mom!"

LUCY lay long awake. She could not compose herself to sleep while that unhappy whimper continued. Against its eerie background her thoughts went to the reason for her stay at Mrs. Renner's out-of-the-way farmhouse in Bucks County. It had begun with the non-appearance of Cora Kent, Lucy's immediate superior in Munger Brothers's linen department. Cora had not returned to work at the expiration of her vacation period and inquiries only emphasized the fact of her disappearance. She had left for the country in her coupe, taking a small table loom and boxes of colored thread.

Lucy had liked Miss Kent as a business associate and felt reluctant at taking over her job. Somebody had had to assume the responsibility and Lucy stood next in line. Her vacation had come three weeks after Miss Kent's and she had insisted upon taking it as a partial preparation for taking over the job. In her heart she determined to scout about the country side to find if she could find some clue to Cora Kent's mysterious disappearance. She felt that Cora would not have gone far afield and so she took up her headquarters in Doylestown, county seat of Bucks, while she carried on her self-imposed detective work.

In the Haycock region outside Quakertown, where many isolated farms were located, she came upon a clue. She had learned at the Doylestown Museum the names of weavers and inquiries had taken her to Mrs. Renner's farm. On the third day of her vacation Lucy had come to an agreement with Mrs. Renner for a week's board and weaving lessons. In the upstairs front room that was to be hers, Lucy exclaimed with enthusiasm over the coverlet on the old spool bed, at the runners on the wash-stand and the antique bureau with its tall shelves and drawers on either side of the high mirror. A stuffed chair upholstered in material that Mrs. Renner said was woven by herself caught Lucy's attention and the antimacassar pinned on the back caught her eye particularly. Mrs. Renner said with a certain uneasiness that she hadn't woven it herself and her eyes evaded Lucy's shiftily. Lucy offered to buy it and Mrs. Renner at once unpinned it.

She said shortly: "Take it. I never did like it. Glad to be shut of it."

When Lucy went back to Doylestown to pick up her belongings, she wrote a brief note to Stan's mother and enclosed the

weaving. She gave her prospective mother-in-law Mrs. Renner's address. Lucy knew that Stan's mother, with whom she was on exceptionally good terms, would be pleased with the odd bit of weaving and was sure it would be shown to Stan when he came home over the week-end from his senior medical course studies.

The antimacassar wasn't as crazy-looking as she had at first imagined. It was a neat piece of work, even if the central design was loosely haphazard. The decorative blocks at corners and center top and bottom weren't so poorly designed and the irregular markings through the center were amusing; they looked like some kind of ancient symbols. Mrs. Brunner would be charmed to receive an authentic piece of obviously original weaving. Lucy promised herself to find out about the weaver, once she had gained her landlady's confidence.

She had asked Mrs. Renner outright if ever a Miss Cora Kent had been at the Renner place and her landlady had eyed her strangely and denied ever having heard the name, even. On Friday morning, her second day on the Renner farm, Aaron Gross brought Lucy a package from the Doylestown laundry, where she had left lingerie. He acted so suspicious and fearful that she was puzzled. When she stripped the covering from the package, he took it and crumpled it as if he were afraid someone would know she had given her address freely before going to the farm. Lucy counted the small pieces; there were eleven instead of ten. There was an extra handkerchief and it was initialed. It was then that Lucy received the first impact of ominous intuition. The handkerchief carried the intials "C. K." Cora Kent must have lived somewhere in the vicinity.

There was a penciled note from the laundry. The handkerchief had been mistakenly delivered to another customer and was now being returned apologetically to its owner's address. Cora Kent had been to the Renner farm. Mrs. Renner had lied deliberately when she said she had never heard the name.

Lucy looked up at the sound of a rustling starched skirt, to find Mrs. Renner staring down at Cora's handkerchief, sallow brow furrowed, lips a straight line, black eyes narrowed. Mrs. Renner said nothing; she only stared. Then she turned suddenly on her heel and marched into the house. Lucy was disturbed without actually knowing why, yet Mrs. Renner's deliberate lie was in itself a puzzle.

THIS was only one of the small things that began to trouble her, like the locked door that confined Kathy Renner. Mrs. Renner had said definitely that she didn't want people barging in on Kathy, perhaps getting her all excited, what with the danger of heart trouble on account of the rheumatic fever. Kathy, it would appear, slept all day for Lucy was asked to be very quiet about the house in daytime. At night noise didn't disturb the little sick girl because then she would be awake anyway.

Lucy sat up in bed now and listened to the child's whining complaint. Why didn't Kathy's mother give the poor child's something to eat? Surely starvation was not included in a regimen for rheumatic fever? There was the faint sound of a door opening and the wails subsided. Lucy lay down then and slipped comfortably off to sleep, feeling that Kathy's needs had been met.

Mrs. Renner's enigmatic remarks and Aaron's peevish disapproval of his employer's behavior on some former occasion dimmed as sleep stilled Lucy's active mind. It was not until afternoon of the following day that Lucy, entering her room to get her scissors so that she might use them when weaving, noticed with sudden sharp recollection of her landlady's whispered words of the previous night that the vase of honeysuckle was conspicuous by its absence. She asked herself vainly what connection had honeysuckle to do with Kathy's wailing cry of hunger? Or, for that matter, with herself?

With the vague idea of blocking Mrs. Renner's contemplated design hinted to Aaron Friday night, Lucy managed to pluck several sprays of lilac and honeysuckle from her open window, smartly avoiding carrying them through the house. She put them into the heavy stoneware tooth-mug that stood on the washstand. To remove these flowers, Mrs. Renner must come out into the open and explain her reason for taking them away, thought Lucy mischievously.

In the big downstairs living-room where Mrs. Renner's enormous lofty loom occupied space, the landlady had cleared a table and upon it stood a small loom about fifteen inches wide. Lucy examined this with interest for she recognized it at once as a model carried in the store where she worked. She said nothing of this but eyed Mrs. Renner surreptitiously when that lady explained that it was an old machine given her years ago by a former student who had no need for it. There was a white warp threaded in twill, for a plain weave, Mrs. Renner explained.

"What kind of weaving can you do on twill?" Lucy queried, thinking of the antimacassar she had sent to Stan's mother, the piece with the queer little hand inlaid figures woven into it.

"All manner of things," Mrs. Renner said. "On a twill, you can do almost anything, Miss. Mostly hand work." She manipulated the levers in illustration as she talked. "You'd better stick to plain weaving at first. Hand work isn't so easy and takes a heap more time."

"That antimacassar you let me have is hand work, isn't it?" Lucy probed.

Mrs. Renner flung her an oddly veiled look.

"Tomorrow you can weave a white cotton towel with colored borders," she said abruptly. "No use starting tonight. Hard to work with kerosene lamps."

Lucy opined that she could hardly wait. It seemed incredible that she was actually to manufacture the fabric of a towel with her own hands and within the brief limits of a day. She went up to her room fairly early and, as she had done from the first, locked her door, a habit acquired from living in city boarding houses. From deep sleep she stirred once into half waking at the sound of a cautious turning of the doorknob and retreating foot-steps and the moaning plaint of the little sick girl's "Mom, I'm hungry!" which seemed so close that for a moment she could have believed the child to be standing closely without her locked door. She thought she heard the child say, "Mom, I can't get in! I can't get in!"

Mrs. Renner was obviously feeling far from well the following morning. Her eyes were ringed by dark circles and she wore a loosely knotted kerchief about her neck, although the sweltering heat would have seemed sufficient to have made her discard rather than wear any superfluous article of clothing. When Lucy was seated at the loom, she showed her how to change the sheds and throw the shuttle for a plain weave, then left her working there while she went upstairs to tidy her guest's room. When she came down a few moments later, she walked up to Lucy, her face dark and grim, her lips a hard uncompromising line.

"Did you put those flowers up in your room?" she demanded.

Lucy stopped weaving and turned her face to Mrs. Renner in feigned surprise but her intuition told her that there was more to the inquiry than was apparent on the surface.

"I love flowers so much," she murmured, deprecatorily.

"Not in a room at night," snapped Mrs. Renner. "They're unhealthy at night. That's why I took out the others. I don't want flowers in my bedrooms at night."

The tone was that of an order and Lucy's natural resentment, as well as her heightened curiosity, made her rebel.

"I'm not afraid of having flowers in my room at night, Mrs. Renner," she persisted stubbornly.

"Well, I won't have it," said her landlady with determined voice and air.

Lucy raised her eyebrows.

"I see no good reason to make an issue of a few flowers, Mrs. Renner."

"I've thrown those flowers out, Miss. You needn't bring any more, for I'll just throw them out, too. If you want to stay in my house, you'll have to get along without flowers in your room."

"If you feel so strongly about it, of course I won't bring flowers inside. But I must say frankly that it sounds silly to me, their being unhealthful."

Mrs. Renner stalked away. She appeared satisfied at the assertion of her authority as hostess and the balance of Sunday was spent initiating Lucy into the intricacies of decorative twill weaves, to such good effect that by the time evening came Lucy had completed a small towel in white cotton with striped twill borders in color.

Lucy fell half asleep in the hammock that evening. The fresh country air and the lavish supply of good country food combined to bring early drowsiness to her eyes. She came awake when a small mongrel dog she had seen from time to time in and out of the Renner barn began to dig furiously around the roots of a nearby shrub, unearthing eventually a small blue bottle half filled with white tablets. She pushed the dog away and picked up the bottle. She looked at it curiously. A shiver of apprehension went over her body. She had seen just such a container on Cora Kent's office desk and Cora had said something about garlic being good for tubercular-inclined people. Lucy unscrewed the bottle cap and sniffed at the contents. The odor was unmistakable. She quickly slipped the bottle inside her blouse. She knew now beyond the shadow of a doubt that Cora Kent had preceded her as a guest in the Renner household. She knew now that the small loom must have been Cora's. The initialed handkerchief was yet another silent witness.

Lucy crept up to her room and again locked the door. She slipped the back of a chair under the knob as a further precaution. For the first time, she began to sense some threat to her own safety. Her thoughts flew to the flowers Mrs. Renner had tossed from the window. Why should her landlady take such a stand? Why had she told old Aaron that she was going to "take out the honeysuckle?" What was there about honeysuckle that made Mrs. Renner wish to remove it from her guest's room, as if it had something to do with Kathy Renner's plaintive, "Mom, I'm hungry!"

Lucy could not fit the pieces of the puzzle together properly. But the outstanding mention of honeysuckle determined her to pull several more sprays from the vine clambering up the wall outside her window. If Mrs. Renner did not want them in the room, then Lucy was determined to have them there. She removed the screen quietly and leaned out. It struck her with a shock. Every spray of flowering honeysuckle within reaching distance had been rudely broken off and dropped to the ground below. Somebody had foreseen her reaction. She replaced the screen and sat down on the edge of her bed, puzzled and disturbed. If Mrs. Renner was entertaining nefarious designs that mysteriously involved the absence of honeysuckle, then Lucy knew she would be unable to meet the situation suitably.

It might have been amusing in broad daylight. She could just walk away to the shed where her car was garaged. Even if "they" had done something to it, Lucy figured that she could walk or run until she reached the main road where there ought to be trucks and passenger cars; not the solitude of the secluded Renner farm, hidden behind thickly wooded slopes.

She told herself sharply that she was just being an imaginative goose, just being silly and over-suspicious. What could honeysuckle have to do with her personal security? She got ready for bed, resolutely turned out the kerosene lamp. Drowsiness overcame her and she sank into heavy sleep.

She did not hear Mrs. Renner's sibilant whisper: "Sh-sh-sh! Kathy! You can come now, Kathy. She's sound asleep. Mother took out the honeysuckle. You can get in now. Sh-sh-sh!"

She did not hear old Aaron's querulous protest: "You can't do this, missus. Let me get the stake, missus. It'd be better that way. Missus . . ."

To Lucy, soundly sleeping within her locked room, no sound penetrated. Her dreams were strangely vivid and when she finally wakened Monday morning she lay languidly recalling that final dream wherein a white-clad child had approached her bed timidly, had crept in beside her until her arms had embraced the small, shy intruder. The child had put small warm lips against her throat in what Lucy felt was a kiss, but a kiss such as she had never in her life experienced. It stung cruelly. But when she yielded to the child's caress, a complete relaxation of mind and muscle fell upon her and it was as if all of herself were being drawn up to meet those childish lips that clung close to her neck. It was a disturbing dream and even the memory of it held something of mingled antipathy and allure.

LUCY knew it was time to rise and she sat up, feeling tired, almost weak, and somehow disinclined to make the slightest physical effort. It was as if something had gone out of her, she thought exhaustedly.

She lifted one hand involuntarily to her neck. Her fingers sensed a small roughness, like two pin prickes, where the dream child had kissed her so strangely, so poignantly. Lucy got out of bed then and went to the mirror. Clear on her neck were those two marks, as if a great beetle had clipped the soft flesh with sharp mandibles. She cried out softly at the sight of those ruddy punctures.

That there was something wrong, she was now convinced. That it also concerned herself, she felt certain. She was unable to analyze the precise nature of the wrongness but knew that it held something inimical in the very atmosphere of the Renner farmhouse and unreasoning terror mounted within her. Could she get to her car and escape? *Escape. . . .*? She stared at her neck in the mirrored reflection and fingered the red marks gingerly. Her thoughts could not be marshalled into coherence and she found herself thinking of but one thing—flight. She could not have put into words just what it was from which she ought to flee but that she must leave the Renner farmhouse at the earliest possible moment became a stronger conviction with every passing moment. In her mind one ugly, incontrovertible fact stood out only too clearly: Cora Kent had visited the Renner farm and had not been seen since.

Lucy dressed hastily and managed to slip out of the house without encountering her landlady. She found her car under the shed at the rear of the barn, where she had left it. It looked all right but when she got closer, she saw to her dismay that it had two flats. She had, as was usual, but one spare tire. She did not know how to take off or put on even that one spare tire, let alone manage to repair the second flat. She would be unable to drive away from the Renner farm in her car. She stood staring in dismay at the useless vehicle.

Aaron Gross's whining voice came softly to her ear. She whirled to confront him accusingly.

"What happened to my car? Who—?"

"You can't be using it right away, miss, with them two tires flat," Aaron volunteered, whiningly. "Want I should take them down to a service station for you?"

She cried with relief: "That would be splendid, Aaron. But I don't know how to get them off."

"Neither do I, miss. I dunno nothing about machines."

Impatience and apprehension mingled in the girl's voice. She threw open the luggage compartment and began to pull out the tools.

"I think I can jack up the car, Aaron. I've never done it before, but I do want the car so that I can get to town. Shopping," she added quickly, trying to smile carelessly.

Aaron made no comment. He stood at the end of the shed watching her as she managed to get the jack under the rear axle and began to pump the car off the ground.

"I'll need a box to hold this up when I put the jack under that other tire," she suggested.

Aaron shuffled away.

Lucy managed to pry off the hub cap but with all her feverish attempts at the nuts and bolts, she could stir nothing. She stopped in despair, waiting for Aaron to return with the box. She thought she might get him to have a mechanic come up from town. Panting and disheveled, she walked out of the shed to look for him. As she emerged, Mrs. Renner confronted her, grim-lipped, narrow-eyed.

"Anything wrong?" inquired Mrs. Renner, both fat hands smoothing down blue checkered apron over ample hips.

"My car has two flats. I can't understand why," blurted Lucy.

Mrs. Renner's face remained impassive. She stated rather than asked. "You don't need to go into town. Aaron can do your errands."

"Oh, but I do want to get to town," insisted Lucy with vehemence.

"You don't need your car until you're leaving here," said Mrs. Renner coldly. She regarded Lucy with impassive face, then turned her back and walked toward the house without another word.

Lucy called: "Mrs. Renner! Mrs. Renner! I'd like to have Aaron take these two wheels into town to be repaired but I can't get them off."

Mrs. Renner continued on her way and disappeared into the house without turning or giving the least sign that she had heard a word.

From the interior of the barn Aaron's querulous voice issued cautionsly.

"Miss, want I should ask the mechanic to come out here?"

"Oh, Aaron, that would be wonderful! I'd be glad to pay him—and you—well. Tell him I just can't get those tires off by myself."

THAT would do it, she told herself. Once the mechanic was there, she would bring down her suitcase and manage to get into town and have him send someone to bring out her car when the tires were repaired. She would manage to leave before night. While Aaron was away, she would work on the loom that she was convinced had been Cora Kent's property. That might disarm Mrs. Renner's suspicions.

She walked slowly back to the house. She was thankful that Mrs. Renner was upstairs tidying the bedroom; Lucy could hear her steps as she walked from one side to the other of the big bed. Lucy sat down at the loom and began to experiment with a colored thread, to see if she would make an ornamental border like that of the antimacassar she had sent to Stan's mother. It was not as difficult as she had thought it might be and went faster than she believed possible; it was almost as if other fingers laid the threads in place for her. She began to build up the border emblems with growing excitement. The corner inserts looked for all the world like curving serpents standing upright on their tails and the center one was like a snake with its tail in its mouth. Time passed. The weaving grew under what she felt were guided fingers.

"Why," she said aloud, amazed at what she had woven in so short a time. "It looks like S-O-S!"

"So?" hissed Mrs. Renner significantly.

She was standing directly behind Lucy, staring at the woven symbols with narrowed eyes and grim mouth. She picked up the scissors lying on the table and slashed across the weaving with deliberate intent. In a moment it had been utterly destroyed.

"So!" she said with dark finality.

Lucy's hands had flown to her mouth to shut off horrified protest. She could not for a moment utter a word. The significance of that action was all too clear. She knew suddenly who had woven the antimacassar. She knew why the adaptable serpents had been chosen for decor. She looked at Mrs. Renner, all this knowledge clear on her startled face and met the grim determination with all the opposing courage and strength of purpose she could muster.

"What happened to Cora Kent? she demanded point blank, her head high, her eyes wide with horror. "She was here. I know she was here. What did you do to her?" As if the words had been thrust upon her, she continued: "Did you take the honeysuckle from *her* room?"

AMAZINGLY, Mrs. Renner seemed to be breaking down. She began to wring her hands with futile gestures of despair. Her air of indomintable determination dissipated as she bent her body from one side to the other like an automaton.

"She didn't last long, did she?" Lucy pursued with cruel relentlessness, as the recollection of that overheard conversation pushed to the foreground of her thoughts.

Mrs. Renner stumbled backward and fell crumpled shaplessly into a chair.

"How did you know that?" she whispered hoarsely. And then, "I didn't know she was sick. I had to feed Kathy, didn't I? I thought—"

"You thought she'd last longer, missus, didn't you? You didn't really mean to let Kathy kill her, did you?"

Aaron was standing in the kitchen doorway. One gnarled hand held a stout stick, whittled into a sharp point at one end. A heavy wooden mallet weighed down his other hand.

Mrs. Renner's eyes fastened on the pointed stick. She cried out weakly.

Aaron shuffled back into the kitchen and Lucy heard his footsteps going up the stairs.

Mrs. Renner was sobbing and crying frantically: "No! No!"

She seemed entirely bereft of physical stamina, unable to lift herself from the chair into which her body had sunk weakly. She only continued to cry out pitifully in protest against something which Lucy's dizzy surmises could not shape into tangibility.

A door opened upstairs. Aaron's footsteps

paused. For a long terrible moment silence prevailed. Even Mrs. Renner's cries ceased. It was as if the house and all in it were awaiting an irrevocable event.

Then there sailed out upon that sea of silence a long quavering shriek of tormented, protesting agony that died away in spreading ripples of sound, ebbing into the finality of deep stillness as if the silence had absorbed them.

Mrs. Renner slipped unconscious to the floor. She said one word only as her body went from chair to floor. "Kathy!" Her lips pushed apart sluggishly to permit the escape of that sound.

Lucy stood without moving beside the loom with its slashed and ruined web. It was as if she were unable to initiate the next scene in the drama and were obliged to await her cue. It came with the sound of wheels and a brake and a voice that repeatedly called her name.

"Lucy! Lucy!"

Why, it was Stan. How was it that Stan had come to her? How was it that his arms were about her shelteringly? She found her own voice then.

"Aaron has killed Kathy with a sharp stick and a mallet," she accused sickly.

Stan's voice was full of quiet reassurance.

"Aaron hasn't killed Kathy. Kathy has been dead for many weeks."

"Impossible," whispered Lucy. "I've heard her calling for food, night after night."

"Food, Lucy? All Kathy wanted was blood. Her mother tried to satisfy her and couldn't, so Kathy took what Cora Kent could give and Cora couldn't stand the drain."

"Mrs. Renner said Cora didn't last long—"

Stan held her closer, comfortingly safe within his man's protective strength.

"Lucy, did she—?"

LUCY touched her neck. Incomprehensibly, the red points had smoothed away.

She said uncertainly: "I think she came, once, Stan. But I thought it was a dream. Now the red marks are gone."

"For that you can thank Aaron's action, Lucy. He has put an end to Kathy's vampirism."

He bent over the prostrate woman. "Nothing but a faint," he said briefly.

"Aaron—?"

"He's perfectly sane and he won't hurt anybody, Lucy. What he's done won't be understood by the authorities but I doubt if they do more than call him insane, for an examination will prove that Kathy was long dead before he drove that wooden stake into her heart."

"How did you know about her, Stan?"

"From the antimascassar you sent Mother."

"With the S-O-S worked into the border?" Lucy ventured.

"So you found that, too, Lucy? Did you know that poor girl had woven shorthand symbols all over the piece? As soon as I realized that they stood for 'Vampire, danger, death, Cora Kent', I came for you."

"What will happen to Mrs. Renner, Stan?"

"That's hard to say. But she may be charged with murder if they ever find Cora's body."

Lucy shuddered.

"The likelihood is that she is mentally unsound, dear. She probably never realized that Kathy was dead. Her punishment may not be too severe.

"But come on, Lucy, and pack up your things. You're going back to town with me and we'll inform the authorities of what's happened."

Vampire Kith and Kin

BY SEABURY QUINN

Heading by Vincent Napoli

"AND I don't mind admitting that the case has got my goat," young Dr. McCormick told me unhappily. "I've never seen another like it, and can't find anyone who has. Will you come have a look at her tomorrow, sir? Perhaps I'd better turn the case over to you entirely—"

"Oh, no, you don't!" I told him. "If you want to call me into consultation I'll be glad

You can pick your friends but not your relatives or lovers. . . .

to help in any way I can, though I'm just a general practitioner, and this seems like a case for a specialist; but if you think it's hopeless—well, I'm hanged if I'll let you hand me the bag to hold. Signing death certificates for other doctors' patients isn't my idea of recreation—"

"Oh, no, sir!" McCormick's sharp denial bordered on hysteria. "It's not like that, at all. It's a matter of professional ethics. My personal interest—you see—oh, hang it, sir! —I'm in love with my patient. I can't observe her objectively any more, can't regard her illness as a case; can't even see her as a woman. She's *the* woman; the one woman in the world for me, and I'm afraid I might overlook a symptom that might lead me to a cure. When you begin to see a body that's functioning faultily not as a defective piece of physical mechanism, but as a beloved woman, your value as a scientist is impaired. When every indication of unfavorable prognosis throws you into panic—"

"I understand, my boy," I interrupted. "The rule that makes us call in other doctors for our families is a wise one. Sometimes I think the physician, like the priest, should remain celibate. I'll be glad to look in on your patient—"

"And so shall I, if you permit it," Jules de Grandin added as he stepped into the study. "Your pardon, *Monsieur,*" he apologized to McCormick, "but I could not help hear what you said to Friend Trowbridge as I came down the hall. It was not that I eavesdropped, but"—he raised one shoulder in a Gallic shrug—*"je n'ai que faire de vous dire."*

I made the necessary introductions and the little Frenchman dropped into a chair, then crossed his hands in his lap and stared fixedly at my visitor. "Say on, *Monsieur,*" he ordered. "Tell me of this case which has deprived you of the goat."

"I'll try to be as clinical as possible," McCormick responded. "Her name is Anastasia Pappalukas; age twenty-three, unmarried. And"—his voice took on a sandy grittiness—"she's dying; dying for no earthly reason except that she is."

De Grandin nodded. "You have made the tentative diagnosis?"

"A dozen of 'em, sir, and they're all wrong. The only thing I'm certain of is that she's fading like a wilting flower, and nothing I can do seems any use."

"Pardonnez-moi, I do not mean to be too obvious, but sometimes we are blinded by our very nearness to a case. You have not discounted the possibility of latent TB?"

McCORMICK gave a short, chinding laugh. "I have not, sir; nor anemia, nor any other likely ailment. Her sputum tests are all negative, so are her X-rays. Her temperature is nearly always normal; I've made repeated blood counts, and while she's just below the million mark the deficiency isn't great enough to cause concern. About her only objective symptoms are progressive loss of weight and increasing pallor; subjectively she complains of loss of appetite, slight headaches in the morning and profound lassitude. Lately she's been troubled by nightmares; says she's afraid to go to sleep for fear of 'em."

"U'm? One sees. And how long has this condition obtained?"

"I'm not quite sure, sir. I've had the case about three months, but how long she'd been ill before they called me I can't say. I don't know much about her background; you see, I'd never met her till they called me. It seems she's been in what we used to call 'a decline' for some time, but you know how vague laymen are. She might have started downhill long before they called me, and not become aware of her condition till her illness had progressed beyond the hope of successful treatment."

He paused a moment, then, "Have you ever heard of a disease called *gusel verenii?"* he asked.

"Mon Dieu!" the Frenchman exploded. "Where did *you* hear of him, *Monsieur,* if you please?"

"I ran across the term for the first time last night, sir. I stopped at the County Medical Society library on my way from Anastasia's and happened to pick up a copy of Wolfgang Wholbrück's MEDICINE IN THE NEAR EAST. I don't know what made me consult the book, except that Anastasia is a Greek—her family came here in '21 as refugees from Smyrna after Greece had

lost the war with Turkey—and I was fairly desperate for a clue—any kind of clue—to her condition."

"H'm'm'm'm," de Grandin made one of those odd noises, half grunt, half whinny, which no one but a Frenchman can produce. "And what did you learn of *gusel vereni,* if you please?"

McCormick answered like a schoolboy repeating a lesson: "According to Wholbrück it is a disease of unknown origin to which Greeks, Turks, Armenians and kindred peoples seem peculiarly vulnerable, and which seldom or never attacks Western Europeans. All attempts to isolate its causitive factor have failed. Objectively its symptoms parallel those of pulmonary tuberculosis, that is, there is progressive loss of weight and stamina, though there is neither fever nor a cough. It is sometimes called 'the Angels' Disease' because the patient loses nothing of his looks as it progresses, and women often seem to become more beautiful as the end approaches. It is painless, progressive and incurable—"

"And Jules de Grandin knows about him, by blue! Oh, yes. He has seen him at his dreadful worst, and better than the *herr-doktor* Wholbrück he knows what causes him!

"Come, my friends, let us go see this Grecian lady who may be a victim of this so strange malady. Right away, all quickly, if you please."

"YOU said you know the cause of this disease?" I whispered as we drove to our mystery patient's house.

He nodded somberly. "Perhaps I spoke with too much haste, my friend. In Greece and in the Turkish hospitals I have seen him and had him explained to me at great length, but—"

"But did you ever see a cure?" I persisted.

"*Hélas,* no," he admitted. "But perhaps that was because the patients' broth was spoiled by an excess of cooks."

"What d'ye mean? Too many doctors?"

"Perhaps; perhaps too few priests."

"Too few—whatever are you driving at?"

"I wish I had a ready answer, my old one. The best that I can do is guess, and though I am a very clever fellow I sometimes guess wrong."

"But what did you mean by 'too few priests'?"

"Just this: In Greece, as elsewhere in the Near and Middle East, the patina of modernity is only a thin coating laid upon an ancient culture. For the most part their physicians have been trained at Vienna or Heidelberg, great scientific institutions where the god of words has been enthroned in the high place once sacred to the Word of God. Therefore they believe what they see, or what some *herrprofessor* tells them he has seen, and nothing else. The priesthood, on the contrary, have been nourished on the *vin du pais,* as one might say. They remember and to some extent give credence to the ancient beliefs of the people."

"What's all that got to do with—"

"Just this: The priests contend the malady is spiritual in origin; the doctors hold that it, like all else, is completely physical. Left to themselves the *papas* would have attempted treatment by spiritual means, but they were not allowed to do so. And so the patients died. You see?"

"You mean it was another instance of conflict between science and religion?"

"*Mais non;* by no means. There is no conflict between true science and true religion. It is our faulty definition of the terms that breeds the conflict, my friend. All religions are things of the spirit, but all things of the spirit are not necessarily religious. All physical things are subject to the laws of science, but science may concern itself with things not wholly physical, and if it fails to do so it is not entirely scientific."

"I don't think I quite follow you," I admitted. "If you'd be a little more specific—"

"*Bien. Bon,*" he broke in. "You do not understand. Neither, to tell the whole truth, do I. Let us start in mutual blindness and see who first discerns the light. Meanwhile, it seems, we are arrived."

THE small house in Van Amburg Street where Philammon Pappalukas lived with his motherless daughter was neat as the proverbial pin. It stood flush with the street, only three low marble steps topped

by a narrow landing separating it from the sidewalk, and the front door led directly into a living room which occupied the entire width of the building. Mr. Pappalukas greeted us without enthusiasm. He was a small man, slim and attractive, with hair almost completely gray and a small white mustache. His face showed lines of worry and his shoulders sagged, not with defeat but with an angle that betokened resigned acquiescence.

"Good evening, Dr. Trowbridge, Dr. de Grandin," he acknowledged McCormick's introduction, then, in answer to our guide's inquiry, "No, there doesn't seem to be much change. I think the end is very near, now, Marshall. I've seen such cases before—"

"And so have I, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin interrupted. "May we see this one, if you please?"

Our host gave him a rather weary look, as if to say, "Of course, if you insist, but it won't do any good," then led us to the bedroom where our patient lay.

She was a pretty little woman with a wealth of softly curling black hair, soft brown eyes almost disproportionately large, a rather small but very full-lipped mouth and a sweet, yielding chin cleft by a deep dimple. Except for her bright lipstick the only color in her face was centered round her eyes where violet shadows gathered in the hollows. "Thank you, Marshall;" she responded to young McCormick's inquiry, "I don't feel much better; I'm so tired, dear, so cruelly tired."

Our physical examination told us nothing, or, to be more exact, served only to confirm McCormick's report. Her temperature and pulse were normal and her skin was neither dry nor moist, but exactly as a healthy person's skin should be. Fremitis was no more than usual; upon percussion we could find no evidence of impaired resonance, and our stethoscopes disclosed no trace of mucous rales. Whatever her illness might be, I was prepared to stake my reputation it was not tuberculosis.

De Grandin showed no disappointment. He was cheerful, and with something more than the conventional "bedside manner," as he dropped into a chair and took her hand in his, his finger resting lightly on her pulse. "They tell me that you dream, *ma chère,*" he announced. "Of what is it that you dream all unhappily?"

A thin wash of blood showed in her face, to be succeeded by a pallor even more pronounced than before. "I—I'd rather not discuss my dreams, sir," she answered, and it seemed to me a look of fear came in her eyes. "I—"

"No matter, my small one," he broke in with a quick, reassuring smile. "Some things are better left unsaid, even in the sick room or confessional."

He drew a notebook from his pocket and poised a silver pencil over it. "And when was it you first began to feel these spells of weakness, if you please?"

"I—" she began, then faltered, drew a long breath and fell silent.

"Yes?" he prompted. "You were saying—"

"I—I can't remember, sir."

His narrow black brows rose in Saracenic arches at her answer, but he made no comment. Instead, across his shoulder he asked me, "Will you be good enough to move the light, Friend Trowbridge? I find it difficult to see my notes."

Obediently I moved the bedside lamp until he nodded satisfaction with its place, and as I stepped back I noticed that the light fell directly on the silver pencil with which he appeared to be scribbling furiously, but with which he was actually making aimless circles.

"*Morbleu,* but he is bright, is he not, *Mademoiselle?*" he asked the girl as he held up the pencil. "Does he not shine like sunlight on clear water?"

SHE looked at the small shiny rod and as she did so he twirled it more quickly, then gradually decreased its speed until it revolved slowly, then swung back and forth like a pendulum. "Observe him closely, if you please," he ordered in a soft monotone. "Behold how he sways like a young tree in the wind, a tired, a very tired young tree that seeks to rest all quietly. It is a sleepy little tree, a very tired and sleepy little tree, almost as tired and sleepy as you, *ma petite.*" His voice sank low and lower, and his words took on a slurred and almost

singsong tone. It might have been a lullaby, a cradle-song to lure her into slumber, and as he kept repeating the slow, almost senseless phrases I saw her lids quiver for a moment, seem to fight to remain up, then slowly, almost reluctantly, fold across her big brown eyes.

"Ah, so!" he murmured as he rose and placed his thumbs upon her brow, stroking it toward the temples with a soft massaging motion. "So, my little poor one, you will rest, *n'est-ce-pas?*" For several moments he continued stroking her forehead, then, "Now, *Mademoiselle,* you are prepared to tell me when it was you first began to feel sensations of this tiredness, *hein?*"

"It was last autumn," she responded weakly. Her words came slowly, feebly, wearily, in a voice so tired that it might have been that of an old woman. "It was last autumn in November—All Souls' Day—"

"*Parbleu,* do you say so? And what had you been doing, if you please?"

"I'd been out to the cemetery to visit Timon's grave. Poor Timon! I could not love him, but he loved me—" Her voice sank lower and lower, like that of a radio when the rheostat is turned off slowly.

"Do you say so? And who was Timon, and why did you go to his grave?"

"Timon Kokinis," she began then stopped as a knock sounded from the ceiling just above her bed, as if a clenched fist had struck the plaster.

"Ah, yes, one sees; and this Monsieur Kokinis, he was—*grand Dieu,* my friends, look to her!"

"*Oh!*" The girl's sharp exclamation had been like the cry of a hurt animal and she caught her breath in a gasp as she began to tremble in a clonic spasm, quivering from throat to feet as if in the throes of a galvanic shock. Her hands, which had been meekly folded on her bosom, wreathed themselves together as if in mortal terror, her eyes forced open as if she were being throttled, then turned up underneath their lids till only a thin thread of white was visible. Her lips writhed back and her tongue thrust out.

"Good God!" cried McCormick. "Hold her, Dr. Trowbridge—watch her mouth; don't let her bite her tongue!" He snatched his kit up, hurried to the bathroom and came back with a filled hypo. "Easy! Easy does it," he soothed as he sponged her arm with alcohol, took up a fold of skin and thrust the needle in.

For something like a minute she continued struggling, then the morphine took effect and she subsided with a tired sigh.

"*Parbleu,* I thought it was *le petit mal* at first!" de Grandin murmured as he dropped the girl's quiescent hands.

"You *thought?*" McCormick shot back. "You know damn well it was, don't you? If that's not epilepsy I never saw a case—"

"Then you have never seen one, my friend," broke in the small Frenchman. "This seizure, if its origin were physical, was much more like hysteria than epilepsy. Consider, if you please: There was no epileptic cry or groan preceding the spasm, and while she ran her tongue out, there was no attempt to bite it." He looked down at the drugged girl pityingly. "*Ma pauvre,*" he said in a low voice. "*Ma pauvre belle créature!*"

McCormick looked at him challengingly. "What d'ye mean, if the origin of her seizure were physical?" he demanded.

De Grandin fixed him with a long, unwinking stare, and nothing moved in his face. At last, "There are more things in heaven and earth, and most especially on earth, than medical philosophy is willing to admit, *mon jeune ami,*" he answered in a level, toneless voice. "Attend her, if you please," he added as he moved toward the door. "I think that Friend Trowbridge and I have done all that we can at present, and further inquiries are necessary for our diagnosis. If anything untoward occurs do not delay to telephone us; we shall be in readiness."

"MAYBE you know what you're doing," I whispered as we went down the stairs, "but I'm completely at sea—"

"I, too, am tossed upon a chartless ocean of doubt," he confessed, "but in the distance I think that I see a small, clear light. Let us see if Monsieur Pappalukas can assist us in obtaining our bearings.

"Tell me, *Monsieur,*" he demanded as

we joined our patient's father in the downstairs room, "this Timon Kokinis, who was he?"

"Timon Kokinis?"

"*Précisément, Monsieur,* have I not said so?"

"He was a childhood friend of Anastasia's. His parents escaped from Smyrna with my wife and me when the American destroyers took us from the burning city. He and she were born in this country and grew up together. We Greeks are rather clannish, you know, and prefer to marry in our own nationality, so when the children showed a fondness for each other his father and I naturally assumed they'd marry."

"Perfectly, *Monsieur.* We make such arrangements in France, too; but the happy consummation of your plans was frustrated by the young man's death?"

"Not quite, Dr. de Grandin. Timon was a wild lad, rather too fond of the bottle, and with a hard streak of cruelty in him. He was two years Anna's senior, and almost from babyhood seemed to think he owned her. When they went to grammar school it was she who carried both their books, not the other way around, as usually happens, and if he did not feel like doing his homework, which he seldom did, he made her do it for him, then meet him at his house early enough for him to copy it. If she displeased him he would beat her. More than once she came home with a blackened eye where he had struck her in the face with his fist.

"By the time they reached high school he had become completely possessive. She was afraid to look at another boy or even have an intimate girl friend."

"Afraid, *Monsieur?*"

"Yes, sir; literally. Timon was an athlete, a four-letter man, and more than a match for any of his classmates. If he caught Anna at the soda fountain with another boy he did not hesitate to slap her face, then beat her escort unmercifully."

"*Mordieu,* and you permitted this?"

Mr. Pappalukas raised his brows and drew the corners of his mouth down. "The Levantine does not regard such things as Western Europeans and Americans do, sir. With us it is the woman's place to serve, the man's to command. Perhaps it is the relic of centuries of Turkish oppression, but—"

"And *Mademoiselle* your daughter? She was born here, grew up here. Surely she had no such Oriental ideas?"

Once more Mr. Pappalukas made that odd grimace that seemed almost a facial shrug. "Anna had been brought up in a Greek household, Dr. de Grandin, and Timon was conspicuously handsome—like one of our old demigods. From infancy she had been led to expect she would marry him—"

"But ultimately there was a break?"

"Yes, sir; ultimately. I don't think Anna ever loved Timon. She accepted the thought of their marriage as she might have accepted him as a brother, because there was no help for it, but notwithstanding her strict rearing and his possessive attitude she began to rebel before she was through high school. When war came and he joined the Army she broke away completely. We could not very well object to her engaging in Red Cross activities, and the contacts that she made in the work changed her attitude entirely. When Timon came back she told him she would not honor the engagement his father and I had made for them in infancy."

"And Monsieur Timon, how did he take her rebellion?"

"He flew into a rage and beat her so severely that she was in bed a week. Then I took sides with her, and the engagement was definitely broken. When I refused to force her to marry him he called a curse down on her, saying she should surely die a prey to a *vrykolakas,* which is to say—"

"One comprehends, *Monsieur.* And afterwards?"

"After that he shot himself."

De Grandin's little round blue eyes lit up with that sharp light I knew portended action. "One understands, in part, at least, *Monsieur.* You have been very helpful. It now remains for us to find a way to circumvent that curse."

"Then"—Mr. Pappalukas' voice trembled—"you think my daughter's illness is no natural thing?"

THE little Frenchman gave a noncommittal shrug. "I would not go so far as that. We sometimes draw the limits of the natural too close. I am persuaded that she suffers from no infection known to biologists, and equally convinced her illness will not yield to ordinary medicine. *Eh bien,* since that is so we must resort to extraordinary means. The good young Dr. McCormick is with her, and will keep us posted as to her condition. Meantime, we shall do what we can—"

"Ah, but what can you do?" Mr. Pappalukas broke in. "You admit that medicine is powerless—"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur,* but did you hear me say that Jules de Grandin is helpless? *Mais non,* it is quite otherwise, I do assure you. I am of infinite resourcefulness, me, and if I do not find a way to aid your charming daughter I shall be astonished. Yes, certainly."

"I suppose you've worked out a theory?" I ventured as we drove toward home.

"Not quite a theory; let us rather say an hypothesis," he answered. "To begin, the young McCormick gave us a clue when he told us he had read Wholbrück. I know that one, me; I have read him carefully and cursed him roundly."

"Cursed him? Why?"

"Because he is a fool, by blue; because he will not believe what he sees. He is like the rustic who visited the zoo and on beholding a rhinoceros declared that notwithstanding he was looking at him there was no such animal. Consider, if you please: Time out of mind it has been believed in the Levant that *gusel vereni,* sometimes called 'the Angels' Disease,' sometimes the false consumption,' is not an illness in the usual sense of the term, but the result of demoniacal possession. In olden days it was more common, but in our time it is met often enough for Wholbrück to have made mention of it. And what does he say of it, I ask you? That its cause is unknown, and biochemistry is unable to isolate its infective agent. You see, he willfully shuts his eyes to the possibility of anything but physical causation. He will not even go so far as to say, 'It is believed by the peasants to be caused by demoniacal possession.' Not he! He says imply that its cause is unknown. *Parbleu,* a fool he is, a bigoted, blind fool."

"You mean you think that Anastasia is possessed by a demon?" I asked incredulously.

"Not necessarily. It would be sufficient if she thought herself possessed."

"If she thought—good Lord, man, what are you driving at?"

"Just this, my old one: Thoughts are very potent things. The African witch-doctor tells the native of the Congo, 'I have put a spell on you,' and straightway the poor fellow sickens, grows weak and dies. In Polynesia the same thing occurs. We have innumerable instances of natives being 'prayed to death' by pagan priests despite the efforts of the missionaries to prevent it. Have not our doctors borne repeated testimony of the potency of voodoo magic in Haiti, and does not the Pennsylvania farmer believe that a hex put on him can cause illness, even death? But of course.

"VERY well, then. Let us assume Mademoiselle Anna believes herself possessed, believes that she, as the old saying has it, is 'called;' that she must surely fade away and die, and nothing can be done about it. Why should she not die in such circumstances? It is not difficult to think yourself into an illness, even a fatal one, as you know from experience with hypochondriacs in your practice."

"That's so," I admitted, "but why should she think herself possessed?"

"Because of Monsieur Timon the Deceased. He cursed her, then committed suicide. In many parts of Greece it is still thought that suicides become *vrykolakas* at death, and you will recall he swore she should be destroyed by such an one."

"What the devil is a *vrykolakas?*"

"He is a species of vampire, not a true one, but something quite similar. The vampire is an animated corpse who steals forth from his grave to suck the blood of his victims. The *vrykolakas* is a disembodied spirit who subtly drains his victim of vitality, and he, my friend, is said to be the cause of *gusel vereni.*

"*Très bon,* let us review the evidence: First, we have a long and intimate asso-

ciation between a boy and girl. The boy is cruel and arrogant, almost, if not quite, sadistic in his attitude toward the girl. He dominates her completely, ordering her about as a harsh master might a dog. All this predisposes her to subservience and docility and makes her malleable to his will. At last she revolts, but her self-assertion is a shallow thing; deep down she feels that he is master. No matter, he hurls a curse at her, then destroys himself.

"She is extremely suggestible—did not you notice how quickly she sank into hypnosis this evening? *Bien. Bon.* The thought—the gnawing fear—of his curse has been planted in her mind like the seed of some malignant plant. Perhaps it does not germinate at once; perhaps it lies there in her mental soil awaiting circumstances favorable to gestation.

"Then what occurs, I ask to know? She visits his grave on All Souls' Day, she calls him to remembrance, perhaps she feels responsible for his self-murder, reproaches herself, thinks of him— How does she think of him, one wonders? Is it pityingly, as for one who died for love of her, or is it fearfully, as of one who placed a curse on her? A curse is very dreadful to the Greeks, my friend, and not a thing to be lightly regarded.

"And then what happens? Thinking of her almost-lifelong servitude to him she goes home, broods upon his tragic, violent death and on the curse he put upon her—that she should die a victim to a *vrykolakas. Barbe d'un poisson,* it has been said, 'As a man thinketh so is he;' it can be said with even greater truth of a woman. Our poor young Mademoiselle Anna goes to bed and slowly pines away, and nothing medicine can do will help her." He sat back, crossed his hands upon the knob of his stick and looked at me with the air of a man who has propounded an unanswerable proposition.

As always, I rose to the bait. "You say her case is hopeless—"

"*Non, non, mon vieux,* I said that nothing medicine can do will help her, not that Jules de Grandin is impotent."

"Then what do you propose doing—"

He glanced at his watch. "First I shall ask you to set me down here. I go to collect *matériel de siège.* In half an hour I shall join you, then"—he grinned one of his quick elfin grins—"we shall see what we shall see, if anything."

HE WAS punctual to the minute, and immensely pleased with himself as he laid a miscellany of packages on the study table. "These," he announced as he held up two small silver censers, "are for your use, and the young McCormick's, my old one."

"Our use?" I echoed. "What're we to do with 'em?"

"Swing them, *par la barbe d'un singe jaune.* I have filled them full of *Mandragora autumnalis,* which was esteemed a very potent drug by the old ones, for it is said that Solomon the Wise made use of it to compel djinn and devil to obey him. And Josephus Flavius declares that at the smell of it the demons which possess a man take flight—"

"Surely," I scoffed, "you don't believe such utter nonsense!"

From another parcel he drew a wide-mouthed bottle of what seemed like black or very dark amethyst glass, stoppered with a wax disc on which were impressed the letters I. X. N. "It is the prison into which I mean to drive him," he explained.

"Eh? The prison—"

"*Précisément. La Bastille.* In the Levant, where such things are, they believe evil spirits can be forced or lured into a bottle, and—"

"You're amazing!" I guffawed. "To think of grown men going through such mummery. I'll have trouble keeping a straight face—"

"Perhaps," he agreed, and the flatness of his voice might have betokened embarrassment or irony, "and then again, you may not. Are we ready? *Très bien. Allons-vous-en.*"

ANASTASIA was sleeping as we tiptoed into her sick room. "How is she?" de Grandin whispered. "Is there any change, any indication of nightmare?"

"Not yet," McCormick answered. "I don't think the morphia has worn off yet."

"Good. Attend me, both of you, if you please." He drew the little silver censers from his portmanteau and laid them on the bedside table. "Anon the visitant will come, and we must be prepared for him. When I give the signal strike matches and ignite the incense in these thuribles, then march about the room while you swing them toward Mademoiselle Anna. Friend Trowbridge, you will march clockwise, from left to right; Friend McCormick, you will proceed counter-clockwise. It would be better if you maintained complete silence, but if you must speak do not raise your voices. *Comprenez-vous?*"

"You spoke of a visitant," I whispered. "D'ye mean when and if Anna has a nightmare?"

"*Peut-être que oui; peut-être que non*—perhaps yes; perhaps no," he responded. "In such a case as this—*tonnerre de Dieu,* regard her, if you please!"

The sleeping girl stirred restlessly and turned her head upon the pillow with a small protesting moan like that a sleepy child gives when wakened. "Quick, *mes amis,* set your censers glowing, commence the promenade!" he ordered.

Our matches bared in unison, and the powder in the censers took fire instantly, glowing redly and emitting pungent clouds of bitter-sweet smoke.

De Grandin laid the wide-mouthed bottle on the dressing table, set its wax cork beside it, and took his station near the girl's bed, gazing earnestly into her face.

She moaned again, made a small whimpering sound; then her lips parted and she raised her hands and thrust her head forward, as if she saw an ecstatic vision through her fast-closed lids. Her pale cheeks flushed, she moved her hands gently downward, as if stroking the face of one who bent above her, and a tremor shook her slender form as her slim bosom rose and fell with avid, quick breathing. Her lips opened and closed slowly, in a pantomime of blissful kissing, and a deep sign issued from between her milk-white teeth; her breath came short and jerkily in quick exhausted gasps.

"*Grand Dieu, l'incube!*" de Grandin whispered almost wonderingly.

"Yes, it's an incubus, a nightmare!" I agreed. "Quick, waken her, de Grandin, this sort of thing can lead to erotomania!"

"Be silent!" he commanded sharply. "I did not say *an* incubus, but *the* incubus. This is no nightmare, my friend, no mere erotic boiling-up of the unconscious in a dream. It is *la séduction*—the wooing of a living woman by a thing from beyond—"

"Dr. de Grandin, look behind you, man, for God's sake!" McCormick's warning came in a thick, strangled voice. "It—it's—"

A ripping, tearing sound came from the window at the far end of the room, and from its rod one of the scrim curtains came fluttering, not as if falling of its own weight, nor yet as if wafted by a wind, but purposefully, sentiently, consciously, as if it were imbued with a life of its own.

WE SAW the flimsy fabric take on curves and form, as if it were a cerecloth draped loosely on a lich—there was the outline of the head, a sacklike rounded protuberance above the line of the shoulders, and from the right and left drooped fluttering wings of cloth as if they swayed downward from outspread arms, while as the thing came forward with a stealthy, creeping motion we saw its lower portion swirl and advance and retreat alternately, as if it fluttered against moving legs. Yet there was nothing—absolutely nothing—under it. Through the loosely-woven scrim we saw the light shine; when it moved between us and the dresser we could see the furniture through the meshes.

"*Grande cornes de Satan,* have you come to try conclusions with me, *Monsieur Sans Visage?*" asked Jules de Grandin in a hard, gritty voice. He stood upon his toes, his body bent as if he were about to take off in a run or spring upon the fluttering horror that came oscillating toward him, thrust a hand into his jacket pocket and drew out a small, shining object.

It was a little golden thing, a tiny reliquary of old hammered gold set with amethyst, so small a man could hide it like a coin in the hollow of his hand, and to it was attached a slender chain of golden links

scarce thicker than a thread. He paid the gold chain out until the ikon hung from it like a pendulum, and with a quick move of his hand swung it toward the advancing form. "Accursed of God," his voice, though low, was harsh and strident as a battle-cry, "rejected of the earth, I bid thee stand, *in nomine Domini!*"

The ghastly, fluttering thing seemed to give back a step, as if it had encountered a quick blast of wind, and we could see its folds stretch tightly over something—though we knew that there was nothing there.

"Conjuro te," the little Frenchman whispered. *"Conjuro te, sclerastissime, retro—retro! Abire ad locum tuum!"*

The sheet-formed thing seemed hesitating, fluttered back a step, lost height and seeming-substance. As de Grandin advanced on it we could see it shrink. The curtain-hem which had been clear six inches from the floor when it first started forward now almost swept the broadloom carpet.

"Back, foul emanation from the tomb—back, revenant of the self-slain, into the place appointed for thee!" His command was harsh, inexorable, and the imponderable sheeted thing gave ground before him.

Perhaps it was a minute, perhaps ten—or an hour—that they dueled thus, but the little Frenchman's fiercely repeated injunction seemed resistless, inch by fractions of an inch the ceremented horror retreated, losing stature as it fled. By the time it reached the dressing table where the black-glass bottle lay it might have draped upon a two-year-old child instead of on a giant as at first.

There was a sudden swishing sound, like that made by a sword whipped through the air, and all at once the curtain fell upon the floor in an innocuous heap, while inside the darkly purple glass of the bottle showed something thicker than a vapor but less substantial than a liquid, something an obscene toad-belly gray that squirmed and writhed and pullulated like a knot of captive worms.

"Misère de Dieu, I have thee, naughty fellow!" Holding the small reliquary at the bottle's mouth with his left hand, de Grandin forced the wax stopper in place with his right, stepped back, restored the ikon to his pocket, and mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief. *"Pardieu,* but it was touch and go, my friends," he told us with a relieved sigh. "I was not certain I could master him when we began our combat." He took a deep breath, wiped his forehead again, then grinned at us, a little wearily. *"Morbleu,* but I am tired, me," he confessed. "Like the horse of the plough at sunset. Yes." He leant against the dresser, and for a moment I thought he would fall, but he recovered himself with a visible effort and smiled at McCormick.

"Look to your sweetheart, *mon brave,"* he ordered. "She will have need of you, both as a lover and physician, but—she will get well. Do not doubt it."

Anastasia lay upon her back, her arms outstretched to right and left as if she had been crucified upon the bed, her breath coming in hot, fevered gasps, tears welling from beneath her closed lids. "Go to her, *mon jeune,"* the Frenchman bade. "Bend over her; *pardieu,* awaken her with kisses as the Prince did wake the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood! Yes, certainly. A man is young but once, and youth and love come back no more; you cannot hoard them as a miser does his gold."

He plucked me by the sleeve. "Come, let us go, my friend," he whispered. "What have we to do with such things? Besides, there is a final duty to perform."

With the dark-glass bottle underneath his arm he led the way down to the basement. "Will you be good enough to open the furnace?" he asked, and as I complied he heaved the bottle into the firebox. It landed on the bed of glowing coals and rolled an inch or so, then burst with a report like that of a smashed electric light bulb, and a sharp hissing followed while a cloud of milky vapor spiraled toward the flue. I sickened as the acrid odor of incinerating flesh assailed my nostrils.

"IT WAS this way, my friend," he told me some two hours later in the study. "I was of two minds concerning Mademoiselle Anna's illness; you of only one."

"Say that again," I ordered. "I don't think I quite understand."

He took a deep breath, swallowed once, and began again, speaking slowly "You were sure she suffered a psychoneurotic condition; I was not convinced of it. Undoubtlessly a good case could be made for either hypothesis, or both. She was neurotic, beyond question, she was extremely suggestible; she had been dominated since infancy by the naughty Kokinis person. Also, she had been brought up on Greek folklore, and knew the legends of the *vrykolakas* as English children know the rhymes of Mother Goose or French children their *cantes de fées.* She might have scorned and derided them, but what we learn to believe in childhood we never quite succeed in disbelieving. *Bien. Très bon.* It were entirely plausible that she should have been impressed by his self-murder and the curse he put upon her, that she should be haunted and deprived of life by a *vrykolakas.* Yes, of course.

"In a neurasthenic state of hypochondria she might indeed have wasted away and finally perished. That she should have dreams of the lover she had spurned, dreams in which he wooed her and she had not power to withstand his importunities, is likewise possible. Even nice young people have erotic dreams, and a highly nervous state is conducive to them.

"You recall she would not tell us what she dreamed? How she blushed when questioned concerning her nightmares? That was clear proof that she did in dreamland when she would not think of doing in a conscious state.

"Very well. The spasm she suffered when she was about to tell us of this Kokinis person was another link in the chain of evidence. It was a nervous blocking of consciousness, a refusal to talk on a painful subject—what the psychiatrists refer to as a complex; a sort of mental traffic jam caused by a series of highly emotionally accented ideas in a repressed state.

"So far a good case for psychopathological illness has been made out; but as yet we lack complete proof. And what disproved it, or at least gave reason for suspecting that some superphysical agent—something you would call the supernatural—intervened?

"Listen, I shall tell you: When she was seized with that spasm there came a sound of knocking on the ceiling of her room. Her nerves—her disturbed psyche—could have caused the spasm, but not the knocking on the ceiling. Not at all, by no means. That was caused by something else, something outside her.

"What was the something that had caused it? *Qui sait*—who knows? Ghosts and spirits, all kinds of discarnate entities, are notoriously fond of announcing their presence by rappings on the walls and furniture. Hence the knocking might have been the visiting-card of such an one; again it might not.

"ACCORDINGLY I drew my line of battle up in two ranks. If what you assumed were true, and her illness was caused by psychic disturbance, we had a chance to master it by going through the show of exorcising the entity she thought possessed her, and making her believe she was cleansed of it.

"So far, so good. But what if it were a real ghostly thing that persecuted her? We should need more than a dumb-show to conquer that, *n'est-ce-pas?* So I prepared for him, also. I had a long talk with Father Zaimis, pastor of the Greek Church of St. Basil. He is a native-born Greek, and knew what I was talking of when I told him I suspected Mademoiselle Anna was the victim of a *vrykolakas.* He did not think I was outside my head when I requested that he lend me two small censers and a reliquary of St. Cyril, who was so justly famous for his conflicts with unholy spirits. Also, he prepared with his own hands the stopper for my bottle, and in it put a tiny filing from the reliquary. Thus armed, I was prepared for all eventualities."

"But whatever gave you the idea of imprisoning the *vry*—the whatever-you-call-it—in a bottle?" I demanded. "I never heard of that before."

"*Parbleu,* my friend, I fear that there are many things of which you have not heard," he grinned at me. "Have the goodness to attend me for one little so small minute."

From the bookshelf he drew a yellow-

bound volume stamped in gold letters, THE VAMPIRE, HIS KITH AND KIN, by Montague Summers. Leafing through it, he stopped at page 208 and began reading:

" 'There is yet another method of abolishing a vampire—that of bottling him. There are certain persons who make a profession of this; and their mode of procedure is as follows: The sorcerer armed with a picture of some saint lies in ambush until he sees the vampire pass, when he pursues him with his ikon; the poor *Obour* takes refuge in a tree or on the roof of a house, but his persecutor follows him with the talisman, driving him from all shelter in the direction of a bottle specially prepared, in which is placed some of the vampire's favorite food. Having no other resource, he enters the prison, and is immediately fastened down with a cork, on the interior of which is a fragment of the ikon. The bottle is then thrown into the fire, and the vampire disappears for ever.'

"You observed the color of that bottle?" he asked. "I had coated his interior with a mixture of gelatine and chicken's blood, of which all vampires are inordinately fond, if they can not obtain the blood of humans. *Eh bien,* I hope he enjoyed his last meal, though I did not give him much time to digest it."

"But see here," I persisted, "if you can pen an evil spirit in a bottle—"

"*Ah bah,* my friend, why continue harping on that single note? At present I am much more interested in releasing good spirits from their bottles." He poured himself a generous potion of cognac, drained it at a single gulp, then refilled his glass. "The first drink was for my great thirst," he told me solemnly. "Now that that has been assuaged, I drink for pleasure." He took a long, appreciative sip, and set the glass down on the coffee table, gazing at it fondly.

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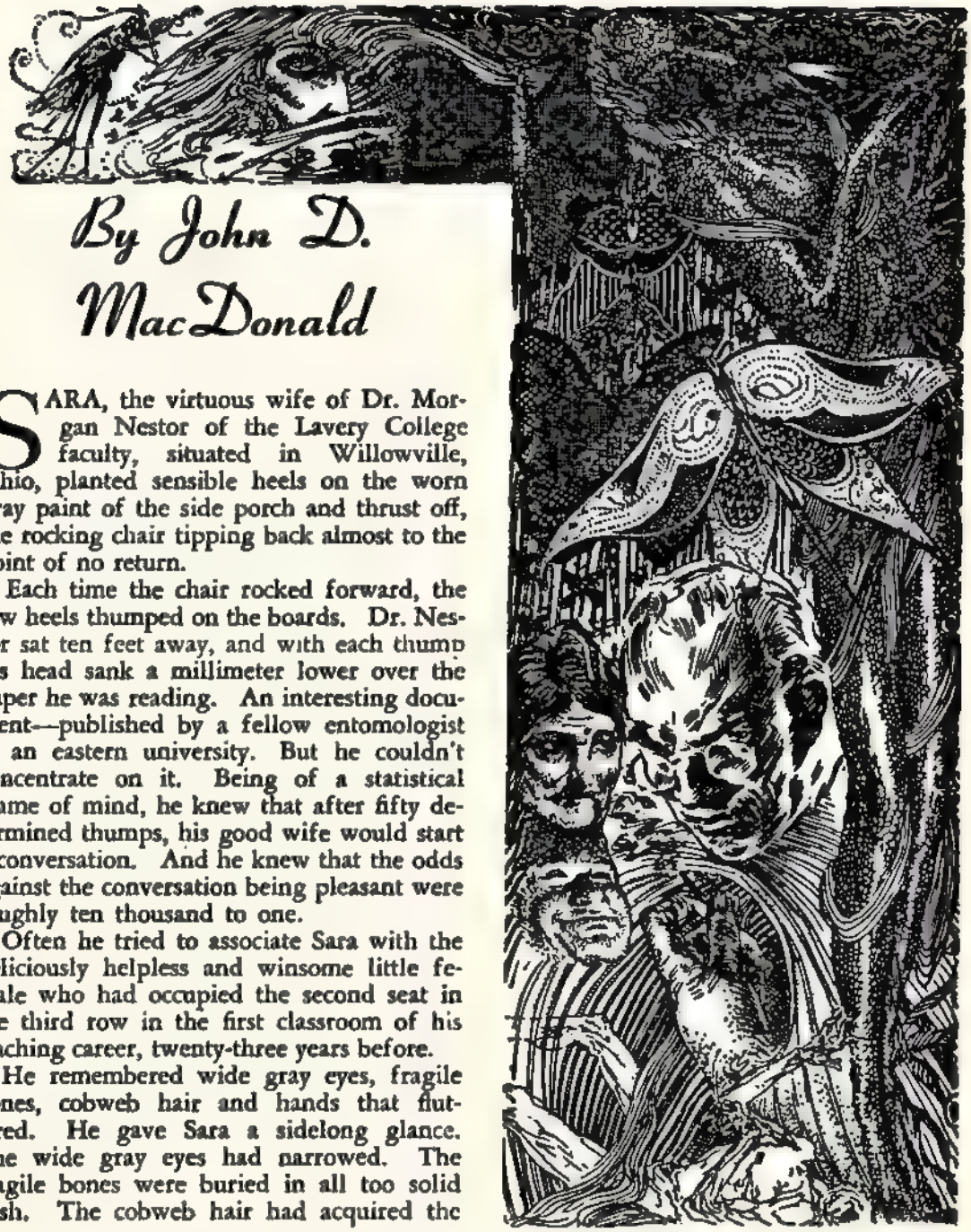
But Not To Dream



By John D. MacDonald

SARA, the virtuous wife of Dr. Morgan Nestor of the Lavery College faculty, situated in Willowville, Ohio, planted sensible heels on the worn gray paint of the side porch and thrust off, the rocking chair tipping back almost to the point of no return.

Each time the chair rocked forward, the low heels thumped on the boards. Dr. Nestor sat ten feet away, and with each thump his head sank a millimeter lower over the paper he was reading. An interesting document—published by a fellow entomologist at an eastern university. But he couldn't concentrate on it. Being of a statistical frame of mind, he knew that after fifty determined thumps, his good wife would start a conversation. And he knew that the odds against the conversation being pleasant were roughly ten thousand to one.

Often he tried to associate Sara with the deliciously helpless and winsome little female who had occupied the second seat in the third row in the first classroom of his teaching career, twenty-three years before.

He remembered wide gray eyes, fragile bones, cobweb hair and hands that fluttered. He gave Sara a sidelong glance. The wide gray eyes had narrowed. The fragile bones were buried in all too solid flesh. The cobweb hair had acquired the

Heading by Vincent Napoli

Hobbies are funny; and you can really get lost in them

consistency of fine copper wire, and had turned steel gray. The hands no longer fluttered.

Her voice had the thin sharpness of a fractured flute.

"Who wrote that?" she demanded.

"This?" he asked weakly, waving the paper he had been reading. Morgan Nestor was a big man who had not become soft through years of sedentary life. He had faraway eyes and a lock of hair that consistently fell across the broad dreamer's forehead. Though he did not realize it, he still caused frequent heart flutters among the coed population of Lavery College.

He licked his lips. "Why Brunhardt wrote this. Good man."

"Ha!" she said. The explosive little sound blasted across the porch and seemed to whip down the quiet, shady street, disturbing the leaves of the silent maples.

With great caution and a too innocent expression, Morgan Nestor stood up, taking one step toward the screen door.

"Sit down!" Sara said. He sat. "Something has got to be done, Morgan."

"About what?" He knew very well what she meant.

"About getting your son a job, that's what. Robert is a delicate and sensitive boy, and in the right department he'd be a credit to the faculty. Also, he would probably do a whole lot better in twenty-four years of it than you've managed to do."

MORGAN NESTOR ran a hand through his hair. During the brief moment that his palm touched his forehead he wondered if he were feverish.

"Sara," he said, "I've explained this a dozen times. We sent Robert to four colleges before we found one that would graduate him. One of the colleges he flunked out of was Lavery. Why it's . . . I . . . it's *unthinkable* that the faculty should take on as an instructor a person who could not make the grade here as an undergraduate. Besides, Robert isn't the type for . . ."

"How do you know what type he is? Have you given him a chance? Have you? I certainly know he's brighter than a lot of fools instructing over there on the hill. Haven't you any influence? What good is it to teach about bugs for twenty-four years if you can't even do a small favor for your own family? What do they have you doing? I thought you were a full professor. Apparently you've been deceiving me, Morgan. Apparently they have you cutting grass or rolling the tennis courts."

"Sara, dear, I tell you that I can't in all honesty . . ."

She suddenly stopped rocking and fixed him with a narrow gray eye, as penetrating as an insect pin. "You can and you will," she said in a low voice, "Even if I have to go see the dean with you. Make no mistake about that."

AT THAT moment Robert appeared in the side yard with a seven iron and a cotton golf ball. He smiled up at the side porch. "Hello, soaks," he said. A psychologist would label Robert as socially immature, with a low attention factor. He was blonde, with a stubble of beard on his ripe jaw, a band of fat around his middle.

He dropped the ball, swung heartily at it. The ball arched just a bit further than the divot he slashed out of the lawn.

Morgan shut his eyes. The lawn had become a sort of retreat. While encouraging and working on the velvety growth, it was sometimes possible to forget . . . many things.

"Robert," he said hesitantly. "The lawn . . ."

"You want to deny him every pleasure," Sara said. "You go right ahead, Robert."

Robert came up onto the porch and collapsed onto the swing. It creaked under his weight. "Too hot, anyway."

"Your father," Sara said, "has promised to speak to the dean about taking you on as an instructor."

Robert licked his thumb, moistened the palm of his left hand and hit the spot with a chubby fist. "Coeds, here comes Robert!" he said.

"It's possible, my boy, that the dean may not see his way clear to . . ."

"Morgan," Sara said crisply, "I am not going to give you the chance of speaking too mildly about Robert. I am going to see the dean with you."

"When?" Morgan asked. His voice had a faintly strangled tone.

"Tomorrow after your ten o'clock class.

I'll meet you in front of the administration building."

Morgan Nestor found himself wondering if there was any efficient way of guaranteeing a broken leg.

He looked at his son with his usual mild disbelief. Could this vast and amiable child be flesh of his flesh? Surely genetics should not play such a dastardly trick on the one man who had so carefully studied the science as it applied to fruit flies.

From within the house there was a scuffling sound, and the clink of a glass. Sara came to attention like a good bird dog. "Alice!" she shrilled. "What are you doing?"

"Getting a drink of water, Mom," Alice answered sleepily. Alice had followed her usual schedule of arising at ten, eating lunch at noon and going back to bed until four-thirty.

Alice came scuffling out onto the porch carrying the glass. Ever since she had reached fourteen Morgan had seen her become more and more like the Sadie Thompson in a low budget production of *Rain*. No power on earth seemed to be able to keep Alice out of shiny black dresses, dangling earrings and a mouth painted to resemble a smashed strawberry.

He had long since decided that her faintly unclean look came from putting makeup on top of makeup *ad infinitum*.

She carried her glass as though it were the most precious thing in the world, but about which she was obligated to act negligent and casual.

Morgan Nestor swallowed hard and avoided looking at Sara. If she discovered Alice's latest ruse, there would be a scene. And somehow, at the end of the scene, it would all turn out to be Morgan's fault. Each day, when Alice got up the second time, she dipped into her secret store of gin, filled a water glass, put an ice cube in it and stayed far enough away from her mother to maintain the illusion that it was water.

Unless she actually caught Alice in the act, Mrs. Nestor blithely ignored any strong odor of alcohol that might hang around her only daughter. She also told friends and acquaintances that Charley Nesbitt, her son-in-law, had brought Alice back and had moved in on them because of the "housing shortage."

Actually Charley and Alice had maintained a rather trim little white frame house on the other side of town, but Charley had grown weary of trying to sober up Alice after work each day.

Alice knew that her father knew that the glass held gin. She winked at him. Through long practice, she was able to drink it as though it were, in truth, water.

At dinner, Alice would be gay, flushed and jovial. The life of the party.

"Alice has *such* spirit!" Sara often said.

Morgan knew that his daughter should go to an institution, yet so long as Sara resolutely refused to admit the flaw, there was nothing he could do.

"Charley's about due?" Alice asked.

Morgan glanced at his watch and nodded. Charley, boisterous and muscular manager of Willowville's only supermarket, usually came home at five.

A distant brassy horn played the first few bars of "The Old Grey Mare."

"Here comes Charley," Alice said in a dull tone.

CHARLEY whipped his coupe into the drive sliding to a stop on the gravel. He bounded out and came up onto the porch steps. He was a balding, florid young man with all his features bunched too closely in the middle of a wide face.

He struck a pose on the top step, slapped himself on the chest. "Promoted again, folks! Whadya know about that? Old Charley comes through, he does."

"That's great. That's dandy," Alice said in a flat monotone. Charley gave her an angry look.

But he beamed at Sara, because she clapped her hands together and said, "Oh, Charley! How wonderful!"

"Yep, from a hundred a week to a hundred and a quarter. New responsibilities. Got four stores under my wing now. They are sending in a new manager here. Have to travel a little, you know. They know they got a good man in Charles J. Nesbitt."

Sara turned to Morgan and said, "Charley's been in that business for five years and now he's making, let me see, twelve hundred dollars a year more than you are. And

you've been fooling with those dead bugs of yours for nearly thirty years."

Before Morgan could answer, Charley swaggered over to him, slapped him on the shoulder. "You tell her, old boy, that the business I'm in would kill you in a year. It's a high pressure deal, what I mean. Have a cigar?"

Morgan took his pipe out of his jacket pocket. "I'll smoke this, thanks."

"Make sure you don't take that smelly thing in the house, Morgan," Sara said.

CHARLEY had left matches on Morgan's chair arm. He filled his pipe, took the packet of matches and struck one. The match burned with a horrid red flame and a chemical snake came writhing out of the end of it. Morgan stared at it in horror and dropped the match. The four of them roared at him. After a few moments he managed a feeble smile.

"Great gag, hey?" Charley said when he could speak. "Picked those up this afternoon. Almost as good as that dribble glass, hey Doc? You remember the glass?"

"How could he forget?" Robert said.

Sara left the porch and went into the kitchen. Alice sat on the swing beside Robert. Her glass was half-empty. Her face was flushed. Charley sat in the rocker that Sara had vacated. Morgan let their conversation wash around him like the sea washing around rocks. He found it puzzling that he was never able to find anything of the slightest interest in their conversation.

He smoked his pipe and waited for dinner. Sara had a knack of achieving the ultimate in tastelessness from even the freshest garden vegetables. The smells that floated out of the kitchen were vaguely sour.

Morgan smoked his pipe and remembered that after dinner he would be able to go into his study, shut the door and be absolutely alone. In the study he could lick the wounds of the day and steel himself for the morrow.

He sat at the table, huddled over his plate, eating from a sense of duty. He thought of the paper he had been working on for three years. A good paper. When it was published he would get letters from all over the world, congratulating him on his new classification system for the subspecies of butterfly, classification dependent on the timing of the phases of metamorphosis.

Suddenly he realized that he had been asked a question. He looked up. They were all looking at him. "What was that?"

"I'll repeat it, Doc. It's like this. With my new job, I got to have office space. A headquarters. I could rent an office in town, but it would be handier here. I was wondering if you'd give up that room of yours. Hell, you don't seem to use it for anything that I can see."

"No!" Morgan said loudly, his eyes wide. "No!" He thought of the unending evenings when he would be trapped in the bosom of his family, condemned to sit among them, half alive. How could he work? Where would he find that solitude on which he depended? He looked at Sara with quick appeal. Surely she would stand by him!

"Charles is absolutely correct, Morgan. You use that room as an excuse for being selfish and anti-social. I've been waiting for years for a good excuse to root you out of there. This is it. We can turn that room over to someone who will get some practical use out of it."

Morgan stood up, his hands trembling as he held onto the back of his chair. "No! He can't have it!" he said desperately.

"Look at him!" Sara said with a savage smile. "A little boy losing his candy cane. For heaven's sake, Morgan. Grow up! Where are all the papers you were going to write in that study of yours? Where is the wonderful fame you were going to have? You might as well face things. The best thing you can do is try to hold your job until they're willing to retire you. Now stop acting like a child and march into that study and start packing those silly trays of bugs."

"I won't do it!" Morgan said hoarsely. Charley was looking at him with an injured expression. Robert was frankly enjoying the scene. Alice was battling hiccups.

Sara lost her smile. "Take your choice, Morgan. Either pack that nonsense yourself, or I'll clear that place out tomorrow while you're at class. And I might not be very careful about what goes in the incinerator."

Morgan looked into the eyes of his virtuous wife for three seconds. All the fight went out of him. With heavy tread he went to his study, bolted the door behind him and drew the shades. He turned on the desk light.

He stood by the desk and his eyes had an unaccustomed sting as he looked around at the small and cluttered room in which he spent so many peaceful and happy hours. The huge desk, the crowded bookshelves he had made, the display trays where, under glass, the insect wings glowed with rare and delicate beauty.

A NEW specimen was on the spreading board. The desk lamp picked up the ovals of brilliant turquoise at the base of the wings. They were his creatures, the moths and the butterflies. Small living things, intent with instinct, unaccountably beautiful.

He sat for a long time at the desk, staring down into the drawer he had opened. In the drawer was the metallic blue sheen of an automatic. He touched it with his fingertips and the chill of the metal entered his soul.

He envied the insects, envied them in the unthinking beauty of their involuntary death.

There was no insect but what struggled against the net, struggled for its small life. And he, Morgan Nestor, would give up life with no struggle.

He shut the desk drawer violently.

For many years he had watched the life cycles of the moths and butterflies, watched the soft worm become inert and hard, watched the splitting, the emergence of a creature of loveliness which perched and slowly dried its mystic wings before the first flight.

His envy of their escape was a roar in his ears. "Unfair!" he thought. "Unfair!" For within one lifespan they existed twice—once earthbound; once creatures of the warm and fragile air.

He knew so well each stage of the process, each instinctive larval transformation.

All thought of packing was gone. He stood near the desk in strange ecstasy, sensing more clearly than ever before, the mystic sequence of changes encompassed by the small dusty bodies he had pinned to the frames.

He wished suddenly that he had never used a killing jar, a net, the spreading boards, the insect pins. His kinship with them was clear and distinct.

Vaguely he realized that that he was wasting time, that he should try to sort out the things to be saved, the things to be thrown away. He tried to remember what Sara had said, and she seemed an alien being, a creature of another race, another life rhythm. Her features were indistinct.

The green shade of the desk lamp cast a soft light in the room.

All of them out there were alien. He could hear the distant harshness of their voices.

Suddenly he began to undo the buttons of his shirt with fingers that were unruly and awkward. He stripped off all his clothes, stook naked by the desk. He heard a distant humming, as of the vast beating of many wings.

The drone filled his soul, a deep and heady rhythm that spoke to him of freedom and of far places.

He stood very straight, slowly drawing his arms up so that his fists were under his chin, his elbows together at his stomach. There was an itching harshness about his skin, and a sense of urgency.

When he fell it was without shock or pain, and almost without noise. He lay on his stomach on the floor, his arms under him, and both legs had somehow become a unit, a single unit, joined from ankle to hip.

He looked along the floor level, and the fibres of the rug were harsh and strange. Too dry.

They should have been of a moist greenness. He yearned for the grass, dimly remembered some oddly upright creature that had hit at the grass with a club.

A tingling ran down the surface of his skin along the forearms that had merged with his chest, along the tops of the thighs and shins that had joined together.

Holding his head high, he began to cross the rug with a sinuous motion, accepting without question the use of the double row of small legs that had sprouted from the tingling flesh.

THE feeling of urgency was great, and yet it carried with it no particular aim or goal. He accepted the domination of the body, let himself be carried along with the body that so obviously knew its function and purpose.

He reached the wall, and without hesitation raised his head, the small sucker legs getting a grip on the smooth surface, carrying him up until his head was within inches of the ceiling.

From the corner of his eyes he saw that his shoulder was sunken, rounded and a pleasing shade of green. He distantly remembered a disgusting pink and white hue. His skin was rapidly growing more harsh and irritating. His mouth, which seemed oddly wider, was pulsating rapidly generating a ropy saliva.

Deftly he fastened one bit of the saliva to the wall, stretched back, seeing it turn firm and silklike on exposure to the air. He made a second rope that was attached a foot or so to the left of the first one.

Where his heels had been, there seemed to be an exceptionally strong clamping device.

With all his strength he dug the clamp into the plaster, fastened it tight. Then, with the two silken ropes held in his teeth, he let himself fall back so that he was at an angle to the wall, supported only by the clamp where his feet had been, the two silk ropes.

The itching and tightness of his skin was rapidly becoming unbearable. He writhed, felt the delicious slackening of pressure as his skin slit down the back. The writhing was difficult, but somehow pleasurable. As he bucked and strained against the ropes, the outer skin gradually rolled down from his body. It took with it his eyes, the myriad legs, leaving him a moist green wetness, vulnerable and helpless.

He was dimly conscious of it falling to the floor below him.

Form was changed. The air brushed the moist inner skin, hardening it rapidly, tightening it, turning it into a protective shell around him.

Sleep was a deep well into which he was slipping. Without ears, he heard the sound of the knocking, and the small part of him that yet retained the ghostly memories of humanity knew it for what it was. They would be shouting and hammering on the door. Soon they would break it down. But by then he would be in the darkness of sleep, protected by the cocoon which would be hard and firm around him.

There would be a time of sleep, and one day the cocoon would split and a shining creature, all memory of manhood gone, would awaken to dry the wide, glowing expanse of wings.

Something inside of him smiled as he thought of how they would stare at him.

To the tiny and distant and unimportant accompaniment of breaking wood, Dr. Morgan Nestor slid down into the deep, unthinking sleep that instinct demands of her creatures.

Kingsridge 214

BY AUGUST DERLETH

THE first call came in around ten o'clock, just when I took over.

"Number, please?" I said.

"This phone just rang," said a woman's voice.

"Not from here, it didn't," I said.

"I heard it."

"I haven't rung 214 since I came on fifteen minutes ago."

She rang off. Bertha Hale had gone by that time, or I might have asked her who had called Kingsridge 214. I was alone at the switchboard, and that meant alone in the building, with a storm coming up outside. Jet, the cat, was outside somewhere, and the office was quiet, not a sound in it but the hum of the wind from outside. By ten o'clock the town was quiet, too. Oh,

It doesn't take much to be lonely in a big house at night, alone with a storm coming up

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

Mrs. Perry called Dr. Burnett out on Route 1, and Gay Plomer telephoned the milkman to remind him not to stop in the morning—they were off on their vacation—but that was all.

They say everything gets to be routine sooner or later, but I never found the night shift at the switchboard routine. Not just because of the variety of calls, either. It's a lonesome job, any way you look at it. You sit there at that board, watching for the lights to flicker, trying not to go to sleep, and sometimes you feel as if you had to sleep to save your life. Sometimes something exciting happens—like the night Jesse Cottrill's son called up from Paris, the first time anybody'd heard from him in ten years. Or the night Steve Mason had to call up his mother and tell her that two of his brothers had been killed in a train wreck.

But such nights are far between.

That night there was no sign that anything was going to happen but the storm. I could hear that, and sometimes there was lightning crackling on the board. I never got used to that, either. I was sitting there thinking of some land I wanted to buy when 214 flashed on again.

"Number, please?" I said.

"Please—my phone rang."

Now, what ails her? I wondered. "I haven't rung 214," I said.

"I *know* I heard it."

"Not by my ring."

"Could someone else ring?"

"No," I said. "You're on this line. It would have to come through here."

She rang off again.

After that time I began to think about it. Kingsridge 214 was the widow Begbie. Rich and young, but never able to keep servants. A kind of high and mighty woman. She had been poor enough when old Jeff Begbie married her, and they had had a dog-and-cat existence for two years before the old man fell off the ridge into the sea. He had been drinking that night, and she, too, according to Mrs. Swenson, who worked there then. The thing to decide was what her game was now. Probably she was lonely. It wouldn't take much to be lonely in that big house out there, two miles out of town,

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and with a storm coming up it would be so much worse. So many women were afraid of lightning; maybe she was, too. Just about then I knew that that light was going to flash on again.

It did.

I plugged in and said, "Number, please?"

"It rang again," she said.

"I didn't ring," I answered.

"I heard it, I *know* I did."

"Are you lonesome out there, Mrs. Begbie?" I asked.

"That hasn't anything to do with it."

"Maybe it has. When you get lonesome, you start imagining things. You want somebody to call you up, and you get to thinking the ring came through. That's the way it is sometimes."

I could almost hear her hesitating there at the telephone. "Oh, no—I'm sure, I'm really sure."

"You can get lonesome easy on a night like this," I said. "I feel that way myself sometimes."

"I guess we all do."

She rang off once more.

THE cat's door opened and she came in, big and black. She came around and rubbed herself against my leg, purring. You can say what you like about cats—they're good company; they mind their business and let you mind yours. You can feel them watching you, but all the time you know they know it's your doing, and none of theirs. Jet rubbed herself against my leg, her back arched, until she had her fill of it; she was sleek and thickly furred—the old-timers said that meant a long winter—and she was well-fed. She jumped up to the desk off my one elbow and there she settled herself, stretching out with her hind legs somehow spread out behind her like a rabbit's, and her front paws folded under her.

"Why don't you go out and keep Mrs. Begbie company?" I said to her. "She's lonesomer than I am."

Jet yawned.

It was eleven o'clock by that time. The storm was still growling away off on one side of the sky, but it had moved quite a little, and it was clear that we were not

going to get much of it. It was rolling around out to sea again, and the switchboard could crackle as much as it liked, the storm was moving away already. It was one of those October storms that never amount to very much. Mrs. Begbie, I thought, would probably see more of it than I would.

I remember that she had red hair. A kind of bright red, so bright it looked artificial. Most of us thought she dyed her hair, but no, it really was that color, an incredible red-orange. She called it copper, but it was too light and too red for copper. She must be lonesome out there, all right. In the first place, she never liked the house, and she would have moved out of it right away, but by the terms of Jeff's will she had to live in it at least five years after his death, or she wouldn't inherit the bulk of what he left, and that was quite a lot. She was allowed winters off, and promptly on the first of December she went, and didn't come back until April.

It was her red hair I was thinking of, though. Funny how you get something into your mind and you can't get it out again; it just stays. I could see that red hair in front of my eyes just as if it were the switchboard.

I tried to get it out of my mind by calculating how long it would be before she called again. I was sure, by that time, that she was so lonesome out there she had to talk to someone, and it was too late to call up anybody who wasn't up. In Kingsridge, anyway. It would be about eleven-thirty, I thought.

It was eleven-twenty.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello. Who is this?" she asked.

"This is Rufus Gilman at the telephone office," I said, "and I did not ring your number."

"Somebody did."

"No, Ma'am."

"Either my phone rang or I'm going crazy."

"Look," I said, "if you're lonesome, why don't you get in your car and drive somewhere. Frenchy's is still open; you could go there for a while. Calling me's no good; I can't do anything about that."

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"I'm not calling you," she said, sharply. "The phone rang, and I answered it."

"Maybe it's the storm. Maybe there's a short somewhere in the wires, or a couple of exposed wires, and when they touch something the bell rings."

"Could that be?"

"I guess maybe it could."

But, of course, there was the light. The touched wires would throw that off, and if something shorted the circuit, she wouldn't get anything out of her telephone; it would be dead. There was no indicator showing trouble.

"Or it could be static," I said. "Is that storm up around your place?"

"No, it's out over the ocean."

"Are you alone up there?" I asked.

"I usually am."

Three more years to go. I felt sorry for her. All her high and mightiness couldn't save her from that will of Jeff's. But then, it was worth waiting for.

"I wish I could help you, Mrs. Begbie," I said. "But there's no way I can do it."

"Can you hear the waves?" she asked me. Her voice sounded strained. "Listen," she said.

I could hear her walk somewhere—across the room; then she must have opened a window, for I could hear the waves pounding up against the bank there, the bank Jeff went down. I could hear the wind and the waves like a steady pounding and roaring. That house must have been a bedlam.

"I don't envy you," I said.

"There's water in the basement."

"Hope it doesn't do any damage. I didn't think the wind was that strong."

"It is. It comes up and sprays against the house."

Abruptly then, she rang off.

She was frightened. It was fright in her voice, not just strain. I wanted to do something for her, but what was there to do? She had lived through storms before, and the waves had been high in other years. You couldn't, after all, call somebody else up and tell him Mrs. Begbie was frightened of something; she could do that herself, if she had a mind to.

But was it weather that was scaring her?

When I thought about it, I wondered. You could imagine you heard a telephone ringing once or twice. Perhaps even three times if thunder was rolling and the claps shook the house and set up that remote but real tinkling, a trembling of the bell; that could happen. Three times at the most. But it was four times within an hour and a half. That would be far too much imagination.

Of course, a frightened woman would be twice as likely to imagine things. Yet it had been only this last time she had sounded frightened—and even then she had kept herself pretty well under control.

I sat waiting for that light to flash on again.

The minute hand crept toward midnight. The deputy sheriff over at Spring Valley called in an accident, and the county police went out to it. The central office at Concord telephoned to check for wires down as a result of the storm, but we were out of that. Nobody else telephoned. Jet miaowed for attention and got it; she purred so that her whole body just trembled ecstatically. Outside the wind was dying down now, and there was nothing left of the thunder or lighting; the wind out of the west had been strong enough to blow the storm right out to sea again. Yet it had done some damage up beyond Spring Valley and Teneriffe, or the Concord office wouldn't have called in to make a storm-damage check.

I turned away from Jet and looked at the switch-board once more. The cat sat there with her ears cocked, alert and wide-eyed, still rumbling a little with purring deep inside her. She wanted to play, but I had no time for that. There were two night-shift calls from the factory over on the far edge of town, and there might be others coming in around midnight.

The minute hand crept on to midnight and went past. The midnight mail went over outside; the night was so still that I could hear the plane for a long time, coming and going. I thought about Mrs. Begbie and her red hair. She must be in bed by this time. She had probably taken an aspirin and gone to bed. That was what she was likely to do.

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I thought about her telephone ringing. Could someone on a lower or an upper floor have rung in? Hardly. Still, it was possible. There were three telephones in that house—one in her bedroom, one in the study downstairs, one in the kitchen that was on the ground floor, and adjacent to the cellars, which were built into the hill. She could have been rung from that telephone—if she had not been alone in the house. But she was alone.

She had said so. She had had the sound of being alone.

YOU get so that you can tell a lot from the tone of a voice. It may sound ridiculous to think of saying that Mrs. Begbie sounded alone, but she did. Alone, frightened, under a strain, unhappy—all that in the tone of her voice. I felt it; I couldn't have felt it more plainly if she had told me in so many words. I thought of her out there in that big house; I remembered how she looked standing all alone on the ridge when the boats were out looking for his body, day after day, and later, how she waited for the sea to give him up, which it never did; I remembered her at the services, all in black, and without make-up; and I thought of her as very small in that big house, very small and alone and frightened, no longer so high and mighty . . .

Just then the light over 214 flashed on again.

I was about to plug in when I hesitated. What would happen, I wondered, if I didn't plug in? Or if I said nothing?

The light stayed on.

I plugged in.

I could hear her. "Hello? Hello? Who's there?"

I said nothing.

"I can't hear you," she said. "Will you speak more distinctly, please?"

Now, what? I thought. What is she trying to put over now? Did she hear me complete the circuit?

"What? What?" she said. "Oh, please—try to speak so I can hear you."

I strained and listened.

Was there something there? Something saying, "Ann! Ann!" Or was it just my

imagination? That was Mrs. Begbie's first name. Ann. Ann Tressider Begbie.

"Yes," she said, "I'm Ann. Who is this, please?"

The cat let out a low growl. I turned involuntarily and looked at her. She was standing up now; her back was arched; her hairs bristled out, and her tail was four times its normal size. She began to sput and back away, and something happened to me. I began to feel cold along my arms and down my back. The cat backed to the edge of the desk; she wasn't looking at me, put at the head-phones. Then she jumped to the floor, streaked yowling across it and out into the night.

I could hear Mrs. Begbie's voice in my ears.

"Who? Who?" she was saying. And then, "Oh, *no!* Who are you? You don't know what you're saying."

I LISTENED, hard. There was something like water washing or wind blowing, with a distant sound of words. Something about somebody coming back, something about what she had done, something about—but no, that was my imagination, that was a trick of the night and the loneliness in the telephone office with the small, green-shaded light and the darkness all around.

"I didn't," Mrs. Bogbie was saying. "I didn't push him. I didn't drug his whiskey. It's a lie. I . . ."

Silence again. Just silence.

"Is it money you want?" I heard her say. "If it's money . . ."

Silence, and the sound of water and wind again.

"Where can I reach you?"

No answer.

"Please. I don't know who told you that dreadful story. You didn't tell me your name."

Silence.

"Your voice? Why should I know your voice?"

No answer.

"You're downstairs? You'll come up? How did you get in?"

Nothing came in reply.

"You came by water?"

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Then I heard an odd sound—like something brittle being knocked together.

"Are you there?" I heard her ask.

No one answered her.

"Hello? Hello?" she cried.

I should have said something then, but I could not. The one thing I had hold of was that somebody had got into her house, somebody was trying to scare her or blackmail her or something, and it was necessary to get someone out there fast. I plugged in the sheriff's number, got him out of bed, and told him what was going on. He was only ten miles away and could get there fast.

Then I heard her scream. "Jeff!" she cried out. *"Jeff!"*

She dropped the telephone.

THE sheriff came in two hours later. I had to tell him how it had been. Five times the light had gone on over 214; four times I had answered, and the fifth time not. Had I heard anything the fifth time, other than her voice? I could not swear that I had, imagination being what it is.

What they had found out there in that lonely house was horrible.

Mrs. Begbie was dead. Something had come up out of the cellar, out of the water that had washed in there from the sea. There was water pooled at the telephone in the kitchen; that had been used. There was water—with some pieces of seaweed—on the stairs. In the bedroom—water, seaweed—and bones. The bones of a man of about sixty. That would have been Jeff Begbie's age. The bones were scattered on her bed, some of them over her face, some of them dug into her neck. They had been in the water for a long time.

"Ingenious," the sheriff said. "Very ingenious. It was rigged up to look as if she had been frightened to death, but of course, she was strangled. It was devilish, all right. Just the same—we'll get him, you mark my words."

But they never did.

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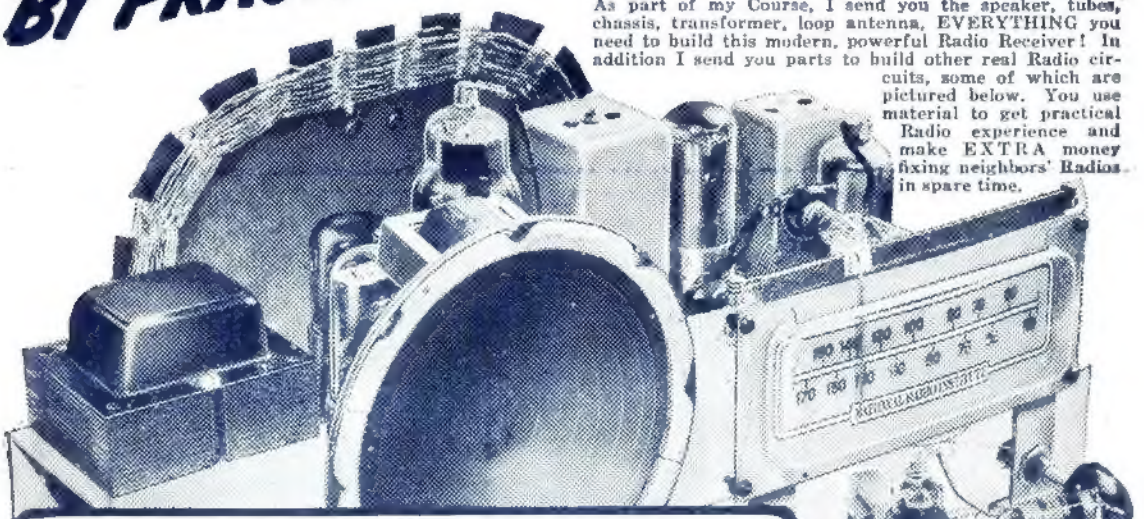

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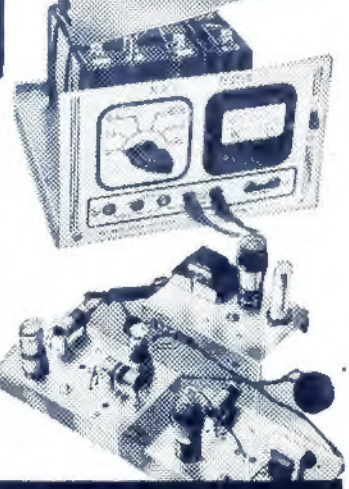

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